TOGETHER IS BETTER

The collaborative way reinforces a range of social uplift programmes undertaken by the Tata Trusts

WHITE WEALTH
Milk is the currency that counts, for nearly 81,000 dairy farmers

INTERVIEW
Naveen Namboothri of Dakshin Foundation on saving our seas from ruin

SHOWCASE
It’s goodbye slum, hello home for the urban poor in trailblazing Odisha
Partnerships provide a potent advantage, on paper at least, when creating social development programmes that are enduring and impactful. The case for collaboration becomes stronger still in the Indian context, where so much needs to be done in village and hamlet, city and town, and where no one entity can, on its own, fulfil the full potential of efforts required to lift people and communities. However, coming together to seed and spread social change is not always a simple affair. After all, it’s on the ground, rather than on paper, that promise is realised and benefits secured.

Commonality of purpose and a shared commitment to community development are often cited as the principal requirements for partnerships in the social sector to prosper. These are the attributes the Tata Trusts seek out when pursuing alliances that can deepen the impact of their initiatives. Our cover story traces the trajectory and gains of the alliances the Trusts have cemented to scale up and sustain social development endeavours in a range of areas — most substantially with the government and also with fellow-foundations and NGOs.

The best partnership is, of course, with the community, and this edition of Horizons reveals plenty of that. Our special report profiles a dairy farming programme that has reached more than 1,700 villages in four states, and our feature stories highlight a bunch of differently-hued projects: tackling the stigma still attached to menstruation; enabling teachers and students to get a taste of experiential learning; chronicling the oral narratives of those who witnessed the heartrending partition of India and Pakistan; lending a hand to help migrant families get back on their feet; and making people participation the centre of a development corridor plan.

Our guest interview this time is with Naveen Namboothri from Dakshin Foundation, who speaks passionately about coastal communities, climate change and the damage being inflicted on our oceans. In a similar (if less optimistic vein), is a piece by the Tata Trusts’ Arnab Mandal, on the dangers of air pollution and what can be done to diffuse them. Additionally, we have entrepreneurial stalwart Subroto Bagchi on the accomplishments of the ‘Skilled-in-Odisha’ brand that is helping youth in the state reach for the stars. Odisha is also the setting for our showcase spread, which pictures a path-breaking effort that has got the urban poor out of slums and into proper homes and liveable surroundings.

Cheers and all the very best, dear reader, for the new year.

Christabelle Naranka

We hope you will help us make Horizons better with your valuable feedback. Please do write to us at horizons@tatatrusts.org.
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Cover image: A village mapping exercise in Khandi in Rajasthan’s Jhalawar district, where a nutrition programme involving the Antara Foundation, the Rajasthan government and the Tata Trusts has delivered multiple benefits to mothers and children

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The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) has joined hands with the Tata Trusts to launch the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education (CETE).

CETE will work across five areas: academic programmes, field-action research and publications, strengthening of government education systems, technology-enabled initiatives, and policy advocacy. The larger objective is to help transform teacher development in India.

Founding CETE — which has received seed support from the Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching — with a strong multidisciplinary team is part of the Trusts’ ‘teacher education initiative’, which aims to create a lasting impact at scale in quality teacher development.

“CETE’s launch reaffirms TISS’ vision of designing high-quality research and academic programmes to respond to changing social realities as well as the National Education Policy 2020,” said Shalini Bharat, the institute’s director.

“CETE will play a pivotal role in transforming the status of teachers in the country.”

Said Srinath Narasimhan, chief executive of the Tata Trusts: “Well-developed teachers, an improved learning environment and an increased capacity in the system to support educators and schools, will ensure equity and quality in education.”

Rotary and the Tata Trusts have announced a five-year collaboration to advance socioeconomic indicators through multi-thematic interventions across India.

The collaboration will aim to scale up efforts in multiple social development spheres, including healthcare, nutrition, livelihoods, education and water and sanitation.

The objective of the Trusts-Rotary collaboration is to contribute to the larger goal of nation-building.

Social Alpha, the nonprofit startup incubator supported by the Tata Trusts, has announced 17 winners in the third edition of TechnoTonic – Innovations in Clean Energy.

The winning solutions included a battery-integrated, fast-charging option for electric vehicles, an affordable solar dryer to minimise post-harvest losses, cost-effective and efficient sodium-ion batteries, and a climate-controlled vertical farming system powered by renewable energy.

The top startups were chosen from a pool of 195 entries and the winners were picked based on affordability, accessibility and user experience, innovation, impact potential, problem-solution fit, scalability potential, business viability and team strength.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Sweden-based RISE Institute contributed to the multi-stage assessment process as knowledge partners.

Speaking about the winning solutions, Social Alpha chief executive Manoj Kumar said, “Social Alpha is already working with 20 startups that, by 2030, collectively have the potential to prevent more than 200 megatons of carbon dioxide emissions every year.”
Paediatric units set up in Uttar Pradesh

The Tata Trusts have set up five-bedded paediatric intensive care units (PICUs) at the government hospitals in Campierganj and Badhalganj in the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) is rampant in the Gorakhpur region, and the management of the disease often needs tertiary-level care, for which children need to be taken to the district health headquarters. Having PICUs at the sub-district level will increase access to critical care, and in a timely fashion.

The Trusts have supported the establishment of the Gorakhpur PICUs by bringing in critical care equipment, with the state government signing on to take care of equipment maintenance, human resources and operations.

Campierganj and Badhalganj were chosen for the initiative since they are remote, populous and vulnerable regions. The two PICUs here can, in a month treat 10-20 children who require critical care.

Speaking at the launch of the PICU facility in Campierganj, Sandeep Chavan, programme officer, health systems strengthening at the Trusts, said, “The median interval between the onset of fever and hospitalisation among children affected with AES in the region is seven days. This contributes to critical delays that result in complications. Enabling access to critical care at peripheral facilities will help in reducing these delays and save lives.”

IHF to support diagnostics firm

OmiX Laboratories has bagged the support of the India Health Fund (IHF) to manufacture devices, for clinical validation and for regulatory approval and certifications. IHF has been seeded by the Tata Trusts, with strategic assistance from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

The OmiX iAMP platform provides an innovation-based solution that does combined testing for Covid-19, tuberculosis and influenza. The platform has an automated sample handling process that uses robotics and AI algorithms to accurately detect and interpret samples by identifying them, through colour, as either negative or positive.

Founded by Sudeshna Adak and Abhinanda Sarkar, the Bengaluru-based OmiX Labs is primarily involved in developing rapid and cost-effective molecular diagnostics for the detection of infections.

Clnl wins for work in tribal education

Collectives for Integrated Livelihoods Initiatives (Clnl), an associate organisation of the Tata Trusts, has bagged a ‘platinum award’ for its tribal-focused educational initiatives at an event hosted by Mumbai-based FGnC Consulting.

When Covid derailed the education of tribal students, Clnl launched several projects to ensure that tribal children were not deprived of schooling. A standout here was Jhola Library, a regional volunteering programme to foster local culture traditions.

Despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic and a paucity of resources, Clnl was able to reach 50,888 students, 700-plus volunteers and more than 2,000 teachers through an evidence-based approach.
Three ‘Ps’ come into play when determining the health of partnerships in India’s social development ecosystem: purpose, patience and perseverance. You could add an ‘H’ to this list of indispensables: humility. Be they with the government — the biggest and most important piece on the board — philanthropies or NGOs, collaborations crafted to serve citizens and communities, depend on these attributes. The Tata Trusts certainly do, highlighting an organisational conviction that joining hands with likeminded entities is the best way to accelerate social uplift in the country. As the stories that follow illustrate, the partnership network nurtured by the Trusts has enabled development programmes in a range of areas to take root and thrive, to support a larger number of beneficiaries, and to reach the remotest corners of the land. By Philip Chacko and Gayatri Kamath
Community connect

Partnerships fostered by the Tata Trusts fall under three broad categories and cover a spectrum of social development themes, from health and nutrition to water and sanitation, livelihoods, education and the environment.

Central and state governments
- Enables reach and scale
- Maximises sustainability
- Ensures permanent impact

Philanthropies and donors
- Expands development projects
- Enhances collective skills and resources
- Supports social sector advocacy

NGOs and nonprofits
- Helps on-ground implementation
- Cements the community connect
- Secures feedback from the field
Apex alliance

Partnering the central government enables the Tata Trusts to assist in driving social development on a pan-India scale

Back in 1909, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) — India’s first academic institute devoted to science — was set up as a tripartite venture between the Indian government, the maharaja of Mysore and Dorabji Tata. A century later, IISc is India’s leading university, a stellar example of successful public-philanthropic convergence in the social development sector.

There are many more examples of flourishing alliances between the Tata Trusts and the Union of India. The two are active partners in many of the Trusts’ big-scale interventions, with goals ranging from identifying the incidence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in rural India to improving sanitation and hygiene practices through the Swachh Bharat Mission; delivering micronutrients to beneficiaries by fortifying milk, rice, salt and oil; supporting the ‘smart cities mission’ through data-based governance models; and embedding water conservation technology in the Jal Jeevan...
The collaborations of the Tata Trusts with the Indian government span the social development spectrum

Mission. From the Trusts’ point of view, partnering the central government enables it to deliver its mandate for social change at a national level.

The strong relationship with Delhi is not new, but the engagement has taken on greater significance since 2014. That was when Chairman Ratan Tata integrated the operations of 14 disparate Trusts — the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, the Sir Ratan Tata Trust and the JN Tata Endowment among them — under the umbrella of the Tata Trusts.

“Earlier, the Tata Trusts functioned as different entities and many government bodies were not aware of the work we were doing,” says R Pavithra Kumar, chief programme director at the Tata Trusts.

To change that impression, the Trusts collectively stepped up their government advocacy. “We started dialogues with several government departments to explain the extent of our interventions,” adds Mr Kumar. “Our approach is to invest in pilot programmes and show the government the data and the proof of concept of our projects. Once they are convinced and come on board, we support them in scaling up these interventions.”

**Strategic value**

Joining hands with the government allows the Trusts to leverage India’s established public infrastructure for greater social impact. And the collaboration model has proven an all-round winner. If pan-India reach and infrastructure are what the government brings to the equation, the Tata Trusts add strategic value in terms of knowledge, technology and project management expertise.

Technology is a powerful tool for transformation. An example of this is the health screening app co-developed by the Trusts. The innovation simplifies screening for NCDs in rural areas and is being used in 500 districts. “We are not afraid to try new and innovative solutions, and we bring this knowledge to the table through successful pilots,” explains HSD Srinivas, project director, health systems at the Trusts.

Expertise is another significant lever and the Trusts have been able to use their years of experience to concretise the government’s vision and put in place practical processes. A recent example is the government’s new education policy, announced in 2020, which promotes the use of experiential learning in classrooms.

“We saw this as an opportunity to shape the mandate on what experiential learning means and how it can be practised by teachers,” says Amrita Patwardhan, head of the education vertical. The Trusts partnered the Central Board of Secondary Education and created a teacher training course for which over 290,000 teachers have already signed up.

Here are a few more instances that show the widespread public benefits that accrue when the public and social sectors align for greater good.
The Tata Trusts-Indian government collaboration has taken on the challenge of battling noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Every year about 60% of mortalities in the country — nearly 6 million deaths a year — can be traced to NCDs, primarily cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and heart disease.

The Tata Trusts had partnered Dell Foundation to create an NCD app for screening patients in rural areas. Its effective use in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh evoked interest in the central government. In June 2018, the Trusts signed an agreement with India’s Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to develop an app linking all the levels of public healthcare, from villages to tertiary-level facilities.

Today, frontline workers in primary health centres use the app to access patients’ medical data. The app creates digital health records and automates the referral process, simplifying detection and diagnosis by doctors and medical officers at district hospitals. The app makes early detection of NCDs possible for rural Indians, and the data informs government health policy.

Pan-India screening for NCDs

- 37 million Indians screened
- Includes cancers, heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases
- 118 million enrolled for digital health records
- 539 districts covered
- 28 states & union territories

Improving access to good healthcare is necessary to transform rural India.
Teaching the teachers

Capability building is the crux of the Trusts-government partnership in education. The most recent example is the course on experiential learning.

In 2019, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) invited Tata Trusts to develop an online course in experiential learning pedagogy so that teachers could make learning more interactive for students. Hosted on the government’s DIKSHA platform, the course was launched countrywide in July 2020. Over 290,000 teachers have enrolled so far.

Other examples include designing a four-year integrated teacher education programme for the National Council for Teacher Education. The Trusts are also a part of NISHTHA, a national mission to improve learning outcomes at the elementary level, that will reach out to 4.2 million teachers across the country.

Partnerships for capacity building

- Central Board of Secondary Education
- National Council for Educational Research and Training
- National Council for Teacher Education
Making nutrition happen

Children and pregnant women are the focus of the Trusts’ nutrition initiative. In January 2018, the Trusts aligned with the Ministry of Women and Child Development to support the National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan) through a multi-sectoral approach.

Under its Swasth Bharat Prerak initiative, the Trusts trained and placed over 300 volunteers (preraks) with 312 district administrations across 35 states. These preraks find innovative ways to make communities more aware of the connect between nutrition and health. Another pathway involves strengthening the anganwadi infrastructure and processes in several states to ensure that young children get the right nutritional inputs. Food fortification is also a thrust area. The Trusts advocated with the Food and Safety Standards Authority of India to set up the Food Fortification Resource Centre in Delhi. This centre now drives fortification of edible oils, milk, rice, and salt for micronutrients such as vitamins A and D, iron, iodine, and key minerals. These fortified staples are channeled through the school midday schemes and the public distribution system. The engagement now touches the lives of 600 million people.

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Supporting Poshan Abhiyaan

- 322 Swasth Bharat Preraks
- In 312 districts of 35 states
- Strengthening 23,000+ anganwadis in 3 states
- Advocating food fortification in oils, milk, rice, salt

Malnutrition can lead to short- and long-term health related problems, especially among children.
Technology is the value-addition that Tata Trusts — together with Tata Community Initiative Trust — brings to India’s Jal Jeevan Mission, the national effort to carry piped water to every household. Measuring and monitoring this precious resource calls for significant technology deployment. The Tata Water Mission stepped in with a smart water monitoring system that is being deployed in 8 states.

IoT (Internet of Things) sensors transmit data on the quality and quantity of water available. The system tracks distribution, leakage, groundwater levels, quality, and community usage in real time. To keep the initiatives local and sustainable, the Trusts train village water user groups and water committees to manage their water resources.

Another engagement that has drawn national interest is the Zila Swachh Bharat Prerak initiative. The Trusts trained and placed over 500 preraks with district administrations to improve sanitation and hygiene by encouraging the community to use toilets instead of defecating in the open.

Going big on Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

- IoT-based water management system in 3,500 villages in 8 states
- Support to Jal Jeevan Mission in 15 states
- 500 Swachh Bharat Preraks deployed in over 475 districts in 26 states

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene are necessary for the sustainable development of communities.
Driving data-based governance

Data-driven governance (DDG) is about basing public sector planning on hard data. To encourage this, the Trusts have partnered central institutions such as NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

The Trusts have worked with NITI Aayog on the Transformation of Aspirational Districts programme, where the task is to support inclusive development by generating data on core areas such as health, nutrition, education, agriculture, financial inclusion and basic infrastructure. The programme touches 700,000 individuals in over 4,000 villages and covers more than 10,000+ institutions in 85 districts.

The DDG portfolio works alongside the Smart Cities Mission to encourage data driven in urban planning. One pathbreaking project was the appointing of India’s first Chief Data Officer (CDO) in the Pune Municipal Corporation in 2017. This led to more engagements, such as developing guidelines for civic bodies on data maturity assessment and open data platform implementation, and drafting an e-learning course to train 100 CDOs for India’s smart cities.

The team has also developed the open-source DIGIT (Digital Infrastructure for Governance, Impact and Transformation) platform, which is being used by 2,000 urban local bodies across 14 states.

Empowering through data

- 91 districts in 27 states
- 1.2 million beneficiaries
- 100 CDOs and 500 administrative officers trained
Technology offers scalable solutions in healthcare and nowhere is the need greater than in the fight against non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer, heart ailments, tuberculosis and diabetes. Vishal Chauhan, joint secretary with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, shares how the Trusts have been able to support the government in the pan-India NCD screening programme.

Why did the government decide to partner Tata Trusts on the NCD screening project? Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are currently the leading cause of death and disability in India, accounting for around 5.8 million or 61% of all deaths annually.

In 2015-16, the Tata Trusts, in partnership with Dell, had leveraged technology and rolled out a population-based screening programme in Andhra Pradesh. Its success led to a request by the Telangana government in 2017 to implement the same, along with some additional components.

It was this experience that led the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to partner Tata Trusts in NPCDCCS (National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases & Stroke). The intent was to leverage information technology in the form of a comprehensive primary health care (CPHC) application.

What made this project suitable for pan-India implementation? The Andhra and Telangana experience showed a strong understanding of know-how, especially in successfully developing and deploying a technology project with health professionals conduct population-level screening of common NCDs. The Tata Trusts were one of a handful of organisations in the country who understood the nitty-gritty of rolling out a project of such magnitude.

For the pan-India implementation, the programme was ably supported by the Trusts with Technical Support Units (TSU) at the national and state
levels. The units provided techno-managerial support to strengthen programme implementation and service delivery. Through these TSUs, the Trusts support field monitoring, along with capacity building and mentoring of service delivery functionaries at different levels of care. The programme includes a digital platform to ensure delivery and monitoring of the NCD programme. It is all about synergistic functioning.

What is the current footprint in terms of geographic coverage, areas of engagement, and beneficiaries?
The CPHC-NCD application is already being used by 30 states and union territories. More than 120,000 users across various levels in the public health ecosystem are using it to implement screening and management of NCDs. Currently, there are over 120 million individual health records.

About 34 million screenings have been conducted by ANMs/CHOs, and 6.5 million suspected cases have been referred for further examination. Already 4 million individuals have been examined by medical officers and 2.2 million individuals are under treatment.

How does the Trusts’ engagement support the government in driving change – for instance, through innovation, technology, data, skilled human resources, project management expertise, and so on?
The government has all the intent to solve large-scale problems. Tata Trusts, with their long experience, has brought in problem-solving skills. The health sector is one of the few where IT adoption is still in its infancy. What the Trusts have shown is how technology can be leveraged, and they have demonstrated this by deploying it across India. This has led to policy makers and decision makers taking corrective action based on the data being captured in the CPHC-NCD system. It has instilled a sense of effectiveness and efficiency in the process.

What advantages do strong government-civil society partnership models like this offer for the government and citizenry?
Civil society has the flexibility to explore and innovate in an unexplored territory or domain with pilot interventions. The ability to deliver successfully gives governments the confidence to take up projects on a larger scale.

Civil society also brings strong data-driven evidence to decision makers, and provides insights and help in taking corrective action and making effective policies. They also play a key role in proving inputs for the effective implementation of the government’s programmes.

Non-communicable diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in India.
Stateside story

State-level interventions by the Trusts focus on driving interventions that address specific development issues

I could not speak English fluently earlier, particularly in public. But now I have become more confident and that has helped my students. My Class II kids used to say ‘gilaas’, now they pronounce it as ‘glass’.” This is the feedback from Apeksha Tai, a schoolteacher in Maharashtra who attended the state-mandated English language teaching training programme called Tejas.

Tejas is a collaborative effort between the Maharashtra government, the Tata Trusts and the British Council which has trained 51,000 government schoolteachers in English speaking skills. It has also created the custom pedagogy framework that would both sustain and cascade the learning.

Alignment with state governments allows the Trusts to upscale projects through state machinery for optimal social impact. R Pavithra Kumar, chief programme director at the Tata Trusts, explains: “Our pan-India presence is an advantage when we speak to state governments about our programmes. When we get a positive response, we run a pilot in
that state to show proof of concept. Once the project shows success, we scale up and talk to other governments to replicate our learnings.”

The nutrition portfolio’s experience with rice fortification is an example of how impact ripples across state borders. The first pilot plants for fortifying rice kernels with nutrients were set up in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra in 2018. The Trusts worked with the State Civil Supplies Corporation to ensure that fortified rice was made easily available across the public distribution system.

Model backing

The Trusts have developed a unique operating model that supports such widespread projects. They have set up associate organisations, or Sector 8 companies, in specific geographies, such as the Centre for microFinance which operates in Rajasthan, Kalike in Karnataka, and in other places. These organisations are the ground-level implementers of projects across thematic areas.

When the need is greater, the state interventions take on a sharper focus. The Assam Cancer Care Foundation was set up in partnership with the government in 2017 to create a state-wide network of cancer facilities. During the peak of the Covid wave, the state governments of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra asked the Trusts to set up new hospitals. That they could (and did) meet these responsibilities is a testament to the expertise that makes the Trusts a force in the social sector.

**The Tata Trusts’ extended network of implementing cells**

- **Karnataka** – Kalike started in the developmentally-challenged Yadgir district and works in WASH, livelihoods, nutrition and education
- **Rajasthan** – Centre for microFinance is engaged in community interventions for livelihoods, education, health and nutrition
- **Gujarat** – Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell supports coastal communities in combating soil salinity through sustainable livelihood, WASH and education programmes
- **Andhra Pradesh and Telangana** – Vijayavahini Charitable Foundation works with marginalised communities on skilling, livelihoods, health and education
- **Punjab** – Reviving the Green Revolution Cell works closely with the Punjab Agricultural University to develop best practices in agriculture
- **Uttar Pradesh** – The Eastern UP Initiative works to improve education and literacy among marginalised communities
- **Odisha** – Livolink Foundation has helped to reduce malaria incidence as well as improve access to livelihood and better healthcare programmes
- **Assam + Tripura + Manipur + Meghalaya** – Centre for Microfinance and Livelihoods works to build sustainable income streams and improve education
- **Uttarakhand** – Himmothan Pariyojana addresses the development challenges faced by rural communities in the state’s hilly areas
- **Jharkhand + Madhya Pradesh + Maharashtra** – Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives works to support tribal populations in central India
- **Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh** – North East India Development Agency supports the region by programmes for livelihoods, WASH and sports
Connecting to health

Technology — and the adjunct capacity building — is the key weapon in the Trusts’ efforts to modernise state healthcare systems. Telangana has been a successful incubator of the Trusts’ multi-pronged approach that spans digital health records, telemedicine, and healthcare worker training.

Here, the Trusts trained over 5,400 healthcare workers in the use of technology. This contingent has screened over 9 million people for non-communicable diseases. The exercise has brought to light over a million potential cases, and as many as 1.76 million patients were referred for treatment. Patient records were also digitised for accuracy and convenience. In all, around 1.95 million people in Telangana registered for e-health records. The success of the programme has led to both the NCD app and the digital health record initiative being adopted on a national scale.

Telemedicine was another successful state initiative. The Trusts trained healthcare providers in telemedicine and set up over 30 hubs in district-level, tertiary hospitals that connect with over 500 primary health facilities. A care coordination centre in Hyderabad supports the hub-and-spoke network to enable seamless care. The platform has conducted more than 53,500 virtual consultations across 13 specialties.

This model is bridging the urban-rural divide, creating access to specialty care in rural areas and reducing the out-of-pocket expenses usually borne by patients for travel and in-person consultations.

Not surprisingly, the Telangana model has drawn interest from other states as well. Madhya Pradesh has brought the Trusts on board for a similar strategy. Here, the Trusts are working with the government in 23 districts to establish a chain of 500 health and wellness centres in rural areas, and 23 urban primary health centres.

The project will directly benefit 10,000 healthcare workers and around 2.5 million citizens utilising these centres.
Education gets a boost

The Trusts’ education vertical is home to a slew of successful projects that follow different strategies to achieve a unified goal – improving learning outcomes.

In Karnataka, the Trusts’ associate organisation, Kalike, works in six districts to develop anganwadis as centres that would guide the first learning experiences of young children. The programme started with capacity building for 44 child development project officers (CDPOs) and 385 supervisors. This cohort has cascaded the training to over 13,330 anganwadi workers. The early childhood education effort has touched nearly 400,000 children so far.

School libraries are a focus area in Rajasthan, where the Trusts worked with the Rajasthan Council for School Education to build 34 model libraries. The framework is being replicated in 3,300 more school libraries across state schools, and over 2,000 panchayat education officers and school principals will be trained in library management.

There are other initiatives with similar impact. In Assam, the Trusts train government schoolteachers to use technology in the classroom so that students get prepared for the digital world. In Jharkhand, the Trusts support parents to become involved in school management to make schools better.

Revamping the education system calls for a sharper focus on quality of teaching and transforming the education system is necessary to meet the aspirational needs of children and create an equitable society.
Investing in nutrition and improving mother-child health form the two-pronged strategy to root out malnutrition.

**Systems for nutrition**

The Trusts’ nutrition portfolio taps into state systems to strengthen them from the inside. In Maharashtra, the Trusts work in the backward districts of Palghar, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli to strengthen anganwadis’ capabilities in terms of mother-child health and nutrition services. These districts were selected due to their staggering child malnutrition levels. Since April 2017, the Trusts have worked to upgrade 4,114 anganwadis into clean, child-friendly, and colourful spaces. Weighing machines, stadiometers, water purifiers, early education toys and other equipment have been provided, and anganwadi workers trained to work in convergence with local healthcare staff. Frontline workers along with communities, have also been trained on mother, infant, and young child nutrition. The team has also taken the message to the community by training members of the Panchayat Raj Institute to monitor the services offered by anganwadi centres.

Another initiative involves encouraging the use of double-fortified salts as a cheap and convenient source of micronutrients. The team partnered the Tamil Nadu Salt Corporation to set up a plant for salt fortified with iodine and iron. Supplying these salts through the public distribution system magnifies the outreach against common conditions such as anaemia. The Trusts have been a key partner for this intervention in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. A study in five districts of Uttar Pradesh showed a lowering in risk of anaemia among regular DFS users. In all these projects, the work is buttressed by building community awareness and capacity building of frontline workers.
Opening up livelihoods

Diversified livelihoods create a safety net for poor, rural households, especially when droughts hit or crops fail. In multiple states, the Trusts work directly with communities to encourage income generation through alternative means such as horticulture, dairy, fisheries, poultry farming etc. Over 1.4 million households earn more as a result of these initiatives. Here’s a glimpse of how this works.

In 2017, the Trusts signed up with the Uttarakhand State Rural Livelihood Mission to upskill thousands of households. Among the beneficiaries were Vijay and Seema Kaintura, who had left Delhi during the Covid lockdown and returned to Chinyalisaur, in Uttarkashi district. With training from Himmotthan, the Trusts’ associate organisation, the Kainturas set up a poultry farm with 50 chickens. Over one year, the business has grown to 3,000 chickens, sells in different local markets, and now employs local people. In four years, Himmotthan has mobilised over 20,040 households and developed over 3,000 community-based organisations for livelihood support under the Livelihood Skill Uttarakhand programme.

In Jharkhand, the Trusts’ associate CInI works with 30,000 households under the Lakhpati Kisan livelihood initiative. In 2020, CInI partnered the state rural development department to introduce horticulture for tribal communities. As a result, vegetable gardens and mango orchards are coming up on barren land, supported by seepage wells and solar-powered irrigation built using NREGA funds. CInI has also helped build village clusters for better market linkages. Over 400 households are already seeing the fruits of this initiative.
Facts, figures and the future

The Trusts have taken data-based governance down to the village panchayat level. The project, in Maharashtra’s developmentally challenged Chandrapur district, shows how this microplanning works for the betterment of villages. In three blocks, village-level data was collected on individuals, households, schools, anganwadis, village gram panchayats, health centres etc to get a complete picture of what each village needed to improve development metrics. The data, analysed on the Trusts’ DELTA framework, was used to create village development plans for 290 villages. This data-supported microplanning feeds into the district and state budgeting exercise. More important, the project made communities aware of how participating in village development plans can influence policy making and thus, civic improvement. Chandrapur also came under the ambit of the Village Social Transformation Foundation, which helped channelise government and CSR funds towards rural development.

The Trusts took the Chandrapur initiative further to ensure last-mile linkages between funding and development. Individuals were supported in getting their documentation papers (such as birth and caste certificates), Gram sabhas (the electoral base that votes for local bodies) were activated, mahila sabhas (women’s groups) were empowered and thousands of youth volunteers were trained as community resource members. Communities were made aware of government schemes for water and sanitation, livelihoods, health and nutrition. Village development plans were written on walls so that the entire community could track progress.

The impact: Instead of development funds being diverted, an average of 58% of the village development plans are now being implemented. For instance, about ₹620 million in government funds have reached these 290 villages to build better roads, toilets, and so on, thus improving the lives of 225,000 people.
Rice fortification involves the manufacture of kernels made of rice flour fortified with vitamins A and D. To the naked eye, the fortified rice kernels (FRKs) look exactly like rice grains. These kernels are mixed with rice in a 1:100 ratio by rice millers before being distributed via the public distribution system (PDS) and fair price shops.

A Surya Kumari, the district collector of Vizianagaram and the former MD of Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation, talks about the ups and downs of the rice fortification programme implemented in partnership with the Tata Trusts.

When did the state government begin the engagement between Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation and the Tata Trusts for rice fortification? In 2016-17, the principal secretary of agriculture entered into an MoU with the Tata Trusts and the state civil supplies corporation started talks about rice fortification. It took 2½ years of technical know-how and planning for the delivery of fortified rice. I believe that is the shortest time for any state to roll out such a colossal programme. The mission was very high level, but we were able to achieve it with the partnership of the Tata Trusts.

The rice fortification programme for PDS began as a pilot project in Vizianagaram in two constituencies, Bobbili and Parvathipuram. Vizianagaram was selected because it is an aspirational (backward) district and the lowest in terms of consumption. We started with two constituencies in the district and then expanded to all 14.

What is the current footprint of the programme, in terms of geographical coverage and service delivery? Currently, fortified rice is part of all PDS supplies in Vizianagaram, available to over 2 million...
cardholders under the public distribution system. The annual requirement is about 144,000 metric tonnes.

Since April-May, Andhra Pradesh has started providing fortified rice in anganwadi centres and government schools. Fortified rice is being supplied to 2,701 schools, 3,729 anganwadi centres and 1,407 fair price shops. And we are doing this through 778 partnerships at the village and ward levels, including door delivery vans. This is quite an achievement.

Has this initiative changed nutrition metrics in the field, especially anaemia and vitamin enhancements?
We have the data from a baseline survey, but the midline survey was hampered due to Covid. I am hopeful that we can take it up soon and that the midline data will show some improvement in nutrition metrics. We would like an external partner to support the survey as the data will be like a litmus test and will show if any course corrections are needed.

What are the different ways in which the Trusts supported the government?
It’s been a long journey that we have travelled together. The major contribution from the Trusts has been the level of technical know-how. They also helped us reduce the costs. The breakthrough provided by Tata Trusts was on methodology, i.e. the use of continuous blending rather than batch blending. This turned out to be very successful.

Then there was a time when we thought that rice millers would not agree to go for the blending machinery. The Trusts helped us work with the millers. We showed them the easiest methods in terms of both finance and technology, and we were able to convince them. Now they can purchase the machinery for less than ₹500,000. Thus, we were able to produce fortified rice in minimum time with minimum resources.

What were the challenges in implementing this project in the field?
One big challenge was ensuring the availability of FRKs. The Trusts helped encourage entrepreneurs to set up FRK plants and identify suppliers of the vitamin premix that goes into the FRKs. Getting the FRKs tested and certified took time as there are very few accredited labs around.

All this called for meticulous planning, but it came together and we were able to achieve things in an economical fashion. The corporation took the responsibility of procuring and testing the FRKs. The millers learnt how to introduce the FRKs into the rice as the last step in the milling process. In the end, the project was a success. If it hadn’t been for Covid, we would have completed this 14-16 months ago.

What are the advantages that strong government-civil society partnership models like this offer to citizens?
I feel that having an external partner helps in advocacy. Consider fortified rice in the PDS system, which includes the lowest-cost commodities in the market. When we say that a PDS commodity is undergoing such a massive change in terms of nutrition, it is difficult for the citizen to believe us. So, if an external partner like the Trusts promotes it, acceptance becomes easier for ordinary citizens, as well as millers and FRK producers. Roping in an acknowledged partner like the Trusts is a reinforcement that helps speed up processes.

Rice fortification is an important weapon in the fight against malnutrition.
Philanthropy is a combination of heart and head, it is often said. It is also – if impact, scale and sustainability be the guideposts – about combining resources and capabilities with like-minded entities to realise shared social development objectives. Get the collaboration equation right and the benefits to targeted communities can be multiplied. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Indian context.

No government can, on its own, enable the social wellbeing in entirety of a country as vast, diverse and complex as India. The mission has a much better chance of success when every segment of civil society pulls its weight, and a crucial piece here is the role played by philanthropies. In the social development sphere, philanthropies joining hands to achieve common goals is an obvious idea; a supplementing of government efforts to lift the nation and its people. The challenge lies in making cohesive a collection of mostly intangible elements.

The essentials are clear enough: commitment to the social uplift cause, well-defined goals and a partnership chemistry where complementary strengths are leveraged to maximum effect. Less visible are factors such as mutual respect, value systems and the humility to accommodate differences. The partnerships cemented by the Tata Trusts with fellow-foundations are a testimony to their steadfastness in abiding by these tenets, seen and unseen.

“Making common cause and agreeing on the approach to be taken are key issues,” says Amrita Patwardhan, who heads the education portfolio at the Trusts. “In all of these partnerships with fellow-foundations, we are necessarily supplementing government initiatives. Between the foundations, we share resources, knowledge, best practices and our experiences. That’s how it works best when we jointly fund and implement social development projects in multiple geographies.”

Reputation, spread and the accumulated understanding of running programmes of substance
and longevity are important reasons why other foundations are keen to tie up with the Tata Trusts. “Getting philanthropies interested in the work we do is not a problem,” explains HSD Srinivas, project director, health, at the Trusts. “The issue is that unlike us, many of them are inclined towards capital expenditure rather than putting money, as well as other resources, into the initiative as a whole.”

**Staying the course**
A commitment to stay the course is also important. “It’s relatively easy to get donors to build a hospital or provide equipment. It becomes a less attractive proposition if we say that we want them to work with the programme for a longer period and deploy their people in it,” says Mr Srinivas. “Intent is crucial for the success of any project, as is the humility required to accept your partner’s point of view. You have to compromise in certain situations just so the larger goal can be accomplished.”

Some philanthropies collaborating with the Trusts have done so because they see an opportunity to expand and enhance existing programmes. The Trusts, in turn, are welcoming of such collaborations, particularly when the philanthropy brings in more than just finances. The multifaceted approach is what the Trusts swear by in social development, and that is what they consciously look for in potential partnerships.

The Trusts-driven Lakhpati Kisan, which began as a livelihoods programme, has prospered since adding entrepreneurship and energy modules to its fold, both thanks to partnerships with other philanthropies. Strength on the ground and having settled projects with plenty of community participation, also work to the Trusts’ advantage when partners come calling.

“If somebody approaches us and asks whether we can run a programme for 20,000 woman entrepreneurs, we can say yes because we have the system and outreach in place,” says Malavika Chauhan, who leads the rural uplift portfolio at the Trusts. “That’s why philanthropies approach us; it works for us because a lot of them bring in new ideas, fresh insights and solid research.”

The positives of collaborating with philanthropies similar in purpose and outlook are a benefit to all those involved, most crucially the community. “None of us can, on our own, realise the full potential of any programme simply because we can’t do everything under the sun,” adds Ms Chauhan. “We put in money and other resources and our philanthropy partners do the same and, together, we add value to the initiative.”

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**Mutual funding and more**
The Tata Trusts have cemented a clutch of collaborations with like-minded philanthropies to realise the potential of different social development programmes. These include:

- **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation** — Nutrition, healthcare, data-driven governance
- **HDFC Bank** — Livelihoods, agriculture
- **Bharat Petroleum** — Cancer care, livelihoods, education, water conservation
- **Aga Khan Development Network** — Water conservation, arts and culture, health, education
- **Axis Bank Foundation** — Livelihoods, agriculture, water conservation
- **IndusInd Bank** — Cancer care, water conservation, sports
- **Titan** — Livelihoods, education, migration
- **Procter & Gamble** — Health, nutrition
- **Pfizer** — Cancer care
- **Syngenta Foundation** — Livelihoods
Fortified to good effect

A mother and child (above) at a childcare centre in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, where fortified rice is served through the central government’s Integrated Child Development Scheme; and (right) dairy workers in Delhi being trained in milk fortification. The two initiatives are supported by the nutrition partnership involving the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Tata Trusts. Launched in 2016, the collaboration works to help the government in realising the objectives of India’s National Nutrition Mission. Food fortification and maternal, infant and young-child nutrition are the focus of this partnership.
Mother, child and early care

Service providers (right) at the community health centre in Nateran in Madhya Pradesh’s Vidisha district being trained in using the app developed for the ‘Alliance for Saving Mothers and Newborns’ (ASMAN) programme; and (below) a nurse enters the details of a mother and her newborn at the district hospital in Vidisha. A partnership involving the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, MSD for Mothers, Reliance Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development and the Tata Trusts, ASMAN’s overall objective was to reduce mortality among mothers and newborns by building on governmental efforts, training service providers and employing technology solutions. The initiative, which unfolded over the 2017-20 period, covers 81 public health centres in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.
Water way in sight

(Clockwise from above) Villagers digging a trench for irrigation in Polingpadar village in Kalahandi district of Odisha; Sobha Majhi from Sorisobandel village in Kalahandi with his sunflower crop; and farmers being trained in Ranipanga village in Kandhamal district. These activities are supported through a collaboration involving IndusInd Bank and the Tata Trusts in south Odisha to implement a springwater conservation and management project.
An improved harvest ahead

A couple harvesting lac (above) in Jama in Dumka district of Jharkhand and (right) a crop-monitoring exercise in the same district. These are two parts of a partnership between HDFC Bank, the Tata Trusts and others, to extend the Lakhpati Kisan programme and cover an additional 16,600 families in the states of Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. Kicked off in January 2021, the programme will build on what has been achieved thus far through Lakhpati Kisan, which has reached more than 1 million people in 21 Indian states and increased their incomes through agriculture and allied activities.
For Apoorva Oza, chief executive of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), the measure of any social development work is the actual impact the effort has on people and communities. The protocols and procedures that come with the territory are, he believes, a distraction at best, and a handicap at worst.

An alumnus of the Institute of Rural Management (Anand), Mr Oza is also the former chairman of the Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell, established jointly by AKRSP, the Tata Trusts and Ambuja Cement Foundation, to tackle saltwater ingress in regions along the Gujarat coast. A lapsed mechanical engineer, he opens up in this interview about philanthropies and partnerships, what works in social sector initiatives and what does not.

Edited excerpts:

The relationship between the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the Tata Trusts has been a longstanding one. What explains the chemistry?
The chemistry has worked principally because of a deep alignment on values. There are three strands to this relationship: the first is a shared ethos on nation-building, the second is the common credo of putting the community at the centre of social development, and there’s the desire on both sides to be open and respectful, equal and complementary while executing partnership programmes.

All of the collaborations between AKDN and the Trusts have been built in that spirit. The two institutions have a clear understanding that they cannot, on their own, do all that is required to be done for India; they see the value in partnering each other to achieve a common set of goals.

When and how do partnerships involving different entities, especially the government, work well in social development initiatives?
If you consider the government and
a particular objective — providing drinking water to all citizens, for instance — there are so many factors involved in making this dream a reality: financial capacity, human resources, technology etc. There is a sense of humility at the government level that it cannot do everything; that it needs institutions who bring different strengths to the table.

A crucial component in any collaboration is the modalities involved. This should reflect mutual respect and mutual dependence. You will fall short if the relationship is one-sided, where one is a giver and the other is a receiver.

What sort of challenges do you face while dealing with the government as a partner?
It is a challenge, and mainly so if you have a tripartite partnership involving a philanthropy, a field NGO and the government. Timely allocation of funds can be a problem for a variety of reasons, and you need to get creative and find solutions. The priority is to get the work done.

Governments can be erratic; that is their nature because they are subject to change — ground personnel may change, officers may change, ministers may change. And every new person taking charge could have his or her own ideas and proclivities. We have to account for that.

What about NGOs, the implementers on the ground?
The NGO is a critical partner in the Indian context in community development. It is the final cutting edge, the organisation that makes things happen on the ground while also providing feedback from the community. Unfortunately, we now have an environment where NGOs are subjected to a huge amount of compliances. We have to consciously give them the space to do their work, which essentially is serving the community.

I believe the grant-making process involving NGOs needs to change. It has to accommodate not just what I call direct costs — for project implementation and all the related stuff — but also the indirect costs associated with overheads, compliance and the rest. The NGO supporting you will struggle to stay afloat if it isn’t reimbursed for the time and effort its staff spend on coping with tasks unrelated to its core work. Grant-making organisations have to be mindful of this.

Have collaborations between philanthropic organisations and NGOs grown significantly over the last 10-15 years? Also, what’s the potential here to execute better work across a wider canvas of communities?
It has grown to some extent, but the truth is that the number of NGOs in many grassroots areas is diminishing. The smaller ones have been badly hit by regulatory changes, and many of them have been left with no option but to shut shop. That said, the quantum of partnerships in the social sector has also increased and the diversity of causes has increased. There is now an entire range of philanthropies working on niche projects in India.

I think the potential to do more is fairly large and this can be fulfilled if, for one, we spend more time with the designing of programmes. I remember a great grant given by the Tata Trusts, one related to an initiative in a tribal area. We had found that non-tribal NGO staff tended not to stay on for long with the project, and we had come up with the concept of having tribal youth take on their work.

The wrinkle was that these tribal youth, despite being educated, did not have the requisite qualifications and the finishing skills for the task. We had approached the Trusts to start a certificate programme in development management with help from outside, and get tribal youth trained and exposed to the NGO sector.

The Trusts agreed, with a suggestion: expand the scope of the programme and include an entrepreneurship component in it, so that those who did not fancy development work had an alternative option to pursue. It was a brilliant idea and it got realised with minimal procedures and processes. The flexibility built into the grant allowed us to secure three times the result we would otherwise have.

Many philanthropies are getting into implementation work directly, sometimes by bypassing NGOs, sometimes by co-opting them. How is this approach playing out?
I don’t think it’s a good idea per se for philanthropies to get into direct
implementation. The point is that many of us think greater value lies in implementation: it gives you eyes and feet on the ground and, crucially, it gets you much more attention and visibility. What it inadvertently does is increase the cost of your development work.

Philanthropies, by design, are more strategic in nature, they have staff of a different order and calibre (mostly located in large metros), and they end up paying more when they start hiring people for direct implementation. And you do this without any discernible enhancements in efficiency. The direct implementation tack is another reason civil society and grassroots organisations are slowly disappearing from many areas.

There’s also the matter of losing the cultural connect that NGOs typically have with communities. Now that’s not to say that philanthropies do not have competent people in direct implementation initiatives. But understanding caste, gender and similar issues at the village level comes easier to NGOs with deep roots in the community.

Yet another downside is that philanthropies pursuing direct implementation, risk forfeiting the wide-angle view of their work in social development. The bird’s-eye picture is what enables them to have a broader perspective, to develop successful strategies and influence policymaking.

Why, then, do philanthropies keep pushing the direct implementation envelope?

One obvious reason is that as organisations and as individuals, you want more recognition and credit for the work being accomplished. You could be supporting a programme financially for five years, but the people in the targeted villages are more familiar with the NGO doing the implementing than the philanthropy providing the funding.

A second point is about the perception that efficiencies are lower at the grassroots, and so are capabilities, which are inevitably linked to salaries. NGO personnel are not paid a lot, so they probably are not all that good — that’s the assumption — and hence the feeling that the philanthropy’s own people will do a much better job.

People in the development sector are not in it for the money they get paid or the power they wield. Their real reward is impact on the ground. Usually, in large philanthropies, staff members are dealing with so many projects that they don’t see, first-hand, the difference their endeavours make to the communities involved. Gratification, it appears, comes fastest with direct implementation.

A final reason is that grassroots NGOs are just not present in many rural regions or in some specific themes. You, as a philanthropy, are in a hurry. You see your project as important and you don’t have the time or inclination to seed or nurture new NGOs. That’s when you say, ‘Okay, let’s do this directly’. There is legitimacy in this point of view, but then you should be doing the implementation bit separately.
NGOs

Last-mile angles

With eyes and feet on the ground and deep roots in the community, NGOs have always been a critical component in the success of social development programmes.

Programme design and processes, choice of development themes and all-round excellence in execution are all important in achieving social uplift objectives. At least as important, is implementation on the ground and this is a responsibility that rests primarily with the many thousands of NGOs enabling countless underserved people in India improve their wellbeing and that of the communities they belong to.

Working to effect social change on the ground is a tough task, particularly in the country’s rural reaches, and it requires attributes of a high order: dedication, knowledge, perseverance and, not least, an acute understanding of the cultural context in which communities live. For the personnel of the NGOs partnering the Tata Trusts, these qualities are essential to ensure the success of social development programmes they help implement.

Putting up with difficult conditions, sacrificing personal comforts and dealing with challenges, both expected and unexpected, are part and parcel of life at an NGO. Compensation for the labour expended is a squeeze, given the scarcity of funds in the

A childcare centre worker checks the weight of an infant in a Rajasthan village under the Akshada programme, a three-way partnership between the Antara Foundation, the state government and the Tata Trusts to combat malnutrition.
sector and staff salaries are often less than ideal. The gratification, however, comes from seeing, firsthand, the benefits accruing to communities in huge need of support.

From the perspective of the Trusts, partnerships with NGOs remain a critical component despite a tilt in recent years towards direct implementation of projects. “We continue to fund many NGOs, especially those working in places where our presence on the ground is thin,” says Malavika Chauhan, head, rural upliftment, at the Trusts. “They bring diversity and a bank of knowledge into the system. They add tremendous value to what we are doing.”

Getting partner NGOs aligned to the strategy of the Trusts is vital, as is providing them with the requisite guidance and skills. “We train our NGO partners to become more knowledgeable and professional, and then they can be our hands on the ground.”

NGOs may not set the agenda in development initiatives but they are crucial to their success, says Rajan Sankar, programme director for nutrition at the Trusts. “They understand ground realities and how the system functions at the village and district levels,” he says. “They are the agents who bring about convergence, and everybody in the country depends on them for implementation, from the Trusts to the United Nations.”

Key stakeholder
The Trusts have, over the nearly 130 years of their existence, worked with more NGOs and nonprofits perhaps than any other Indian philanthropic institution. “We have always seen our NGO partners as key stakeholders in the larger, social development process,”

Ground reality
The advantages NGOs bring to the implementation table are manifold…

- Deep roots in the community
- An understanding of local cultural contexts
- Getting feedback from target groups
- Being convergence agents in social development
- Providing eyes and feet in the field

says Amrita Patwardhan, head, education, at the Trusts. “We have always worked closely with NGOs and we are increasingly co-designing programmes with them.”

Notwithstanding the many advantages NGOs deliver, the outlook does not look too promising for them. Regulatory roadblocks, restricted funding, lack of capacity building and stymied organisational growth — not to mention the pandemic — are undermining India’s NGOs to a considerable extent. That is a loss for the country’s social sector.

(A report published by the Bridgespan Group in March 2021 states that 83% of the 388 Indian NGOs it surveyed in the aftermath of the first Covid wave, were struggling to stay afloat, and that more than half of them are in serious financial distress. “Our research revealed a clear pattern of chronic underfunding, leading to severe financial stress [for NGOs]”, the report said, adding that this “acts as a brake on their ability to ... reach more communities and individuals in need.”)

“It’s always difficult to find an NGO partner capable of delivering precisely up to expectations,” says HSD Srinivas, project director for health at the Trusts. “Philanthropies and donors are not inclined to fund the non-programme expenditure of NGOs, and this places the latter at a disadvantage. But you have to give these people a certain amount of leeway. Relationship building and the nurturing of partnerships take quite a bit of time. It cannot always be one plus one equals two.”
Learning’s the change agent

(Above) Children at a book fest supported by the Tata Trusts’ Parag initiative in the Dausa district of Rajasthan. Parag has developed a wealth of literature to promote reading among underprivileged children, joining hands with NGOs like Eklavya, which has a network of education centres in Madhya Pradesh, and the Bhopal-based Ektara, which has set up an academy to train illustrators for children’s books. (Right) Women at a literacy centre that was established through a collaboration between the Tata Trusts and the nonprofit Nirantar, in the Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh.
Rural health in the crosshairs

The Tata Trusts have been a steadfast supporter of Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS), a nonprofit that has been providing preventive and curative healthcare services to people from the tribal and rural areas of Bilaspur, in Chhattisgarh. JSS does this through a community health programme and a rural health setup that includes a hospital. Seen here are (above) patients at a referral centre in Ganiyari in Bilaspur district and (right) tribal women talking to a health coordinator in Aurapani village, also in Bilaspur.
The Tata Trusts have been longstanding partners of the Sadguru Water and Development Foundation, which has been working since 1976 in the tribal areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to improve the livelihood prospects of underserved communities. Seen here are (above) a farmer with her ivy gourd pickings in Khedpa village in Gujarat’s Dahod district; (left) harvesting marigolds in Kamboi village in Dahod; and (bottom left) a check dam in Thekamajra village in Dahod.
Much-needed nutrient push

Meals being served to kids (left) at a childcare centre in Khandi village in the Jhalawar district of Rajasthan; and (below) pre-school education at the same childcare centre. Many such efforts unfold in the Akshada programme, a partnership between the Antara Foundation, the Tata Trusts and the Rajasthan government. The Antara Foundation, an NGO, has reached more than 11 million women and children through a clutch of projects that address infant mortality, maternal mortality and malnutrition in Rajasthan. The Foundation has sought out and secured solutions in antenatal and newborn care as well as child nutrition.
The Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) has been the heart and soul of Swami Kalikrishnananda’s life for as far back as he can remember. The long-serving assistant secretary of the RKM Sevashrama charitable hospital in Vrindavan, was born into a family of devotees and grew up next door to the Mission’s centre in Rajahmundry, the historic city on the banks of the Godavari in Andhra Pradesh.

The 44-year-old Swami Kalikrishnananda has been with the Mission – officially that is – for 22 summers, and has served at RKM Sevashrama for more than eight of those. The 300-bed charitable hospital began as a small homeopathic dispensary in 1907, and has grown into a high-quality, multispecialty healthcare centre that provides free or subsidised treatment to the majority of its patients.

The Tata Trusts have been among RKM Sevashrama’s staunchest supporters, providing financial and other assistance to help the hospital expand its facilities and services. Swami Kalikrishnananda says the two institutions are part of “one family” and harks back to a time, (and a famous encounter) that marked the start of the relationship: the meeting, in May 1893, between Swami Vivekananda and Jamsetji Tata — founders, respectively, of a unique spiritual organisation and an exceptional industrial enterprise — on a steamship voyage from Japan to Canada.

Swami Kalikrishnananda, who dropped out of an MBA course to join RKM, speaks here about the hospital under his charge, the socially-inclusive care it provides, and the partnerships that enable the effort.

How important is the contribution that social organisations such as RKM make in helping address India’s healthcare needs? Unlike in many Western countries,
the private sector is huge in India’s healthcare sector. This despite there being a sizeable network of government hospitals in the country. Private hospitals have an enormous say and they are, obviously, money driven. Given the context, nonprofit organisations such as RKM have an important role to play in delivering medical services, either subsidised or at cost.

Our effort has always been to give the best quality of care to all our patients, irrespective of their financial and social status. This is a 300-bed hospital and 180 of these beds are exclusively for financially stressed patients. They get free medicines, free beds, free consultations, even free washing and cleaning. We do it without compromising one bit on the quality of care we provide. More institutions and organisations should join this cause; that would be a benefit to society.

Given the top-notch facilities and services that RKM Sevashrama offers, and the fact that these are free or subsidised, is there a rush of patients coming here? If so, how do you cope?

There is a huge rush in our hospital compared with other hospitals in the region and that’s due to the quality and affordability of the services we offer. At present we have the necessary infrastructure to cope with the rush, but we have had to deal with a shortage of beds since the Covid pandemic hit. We have been forced to say no to some patients but this is a temporary phenomenon.

As I see it, mindsets are more important than skill sets. Not everybody has the necessary commitment to work in a charitable institution and in an environment that’s far removed from the corporate culture of private hospitals. Most of our patients are poor or from a middle-class background, and many are not educated. Handling such patients is a challenge, and you have to deal with them differently. This can become difficult sometimes; it certainly isn’t everybody’s cup of tea.

How can India as a country, provide adequate healthcare to its people?

Health and education are sectors where the government necessarily has to play the dominant role. The government has to come forward if change is to happen in our healthcare system. Charitable institutions such as RKM and the Tata Trusts can supplement government efforts and fill some gaps, but there is only so much that we can do.

Government hospitals have to raise their quality standards to come at par with private hospitals, and it’s not enough to merely build fancy facilities. Take the government hospital in Vrindavan as an example. It does not lack for infrastructure and equipment, but it suffers due to a severe shortage of staff. Similar is the case with the district hospital here.

It’s not as if this cannot be accomplished. I was in Kerala for nearly seven years, and the government hospitals there are as good as any private hospital. That’s not how it is in a majority of other states, which is why 80% of India’s healthcare needs are met by the private sector. But only the rich and upper middle class can afford private hospitals; a poor person
stricken by sickness or disease, does not have that choice.

**RKM and the Tata Trusts have ties that go back a long way.**

**What are the ingredients that make for a fruitful partnership?**

The fundamental ingredient is uniformity of ideas. The RKM credo is ‘service to man is service to God’. The Tata Trusts motto may be different but it’s similar in that both are committed to serving society. It is this uniformity in outlook that underpins the relationship between RKM Sevashrama and the Trusts.

It can be said this relationship began with that famous meeting between Swami Vivekananda and Jamsetji Tata when they travelled together by ship from Yokohama to Vancouver. Our present hospital building came up in 1963 — it was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru — and the Tatas made a contribution for its construction.

The Trusts have been supporting the Vrindavan hospital since 2015 in a variety of ways, and this has been a huge help. They have backed us financially and also provided us with technical support. Our association is strong, our bond is strong. We don’t consider the Trusts as separate from our organisation; we are part of one family with a shared spirit of service.

**Indians as a whole are not too well-known for contributing money to social causes. Does that make it tough for charitable institutions like RKM to raise resources for its programmes?**

I have to disagree with your contention. In India we have the concept of ‘Vasudaiva Kutumbakam’; we are a family and we help one another. When you consider the financial status of Indians and the amount they contribute to charity, I think the ratio is far better than in many developed countries. As far as RKM Sevashrama is concerned, about 50% of our monetary resources are raised through donations, ranging from a few rupees to more than a crore.

We have benefitted vitally — as have a lot of other NGOs — from funding coming through companies and their CSR [corporate social responsibility] pipeline. Then there are institutions such as the Tata Trusts, which have been our biggest donor. No other organisation has supported us to this extent, and as steadfastly, as the Tata Trusts.
Milk is the currency that counts, and collective selling the clout that matters for over 81,000 dairy farmers, the majority of them women

Rajeshwari would not have believed, five years ago, that selling milk could change her life. Back then, hawking the surplus milk produced by her two buffaloes was a pain for this farmer from Jaitapur village in Uttar Pradesh’s Pratapgarh district. Sometimes buyers in the local market wouldn’t want any, and the milk would go to waste. Her earnings were meagre even if they did buy it. That was before Ms Rajeshwari joined the Shwetdhara Milk Producer Company (MPC) in 2016.

Ms Rajeshwari now trades 15 litres of milk every day to Shwetdhara. The process is quick, easy and transparent; not a drop stays unsold; and Ms Rajeshwari has a reliable stream of income that is credited into her bank account every 10 days. It’s money well-earned and much needed. “I’ve been able to put my daughter through nursing college and soon I’ll get her married,” she says. “I’ve bought more cows and buffaloes and built a proper shelter for them.”

Ms Rajeshwari is one of 81,305 dairy farmers – 93% of them women – who have made milk their passport to a brighter future. These farmers are members of five MPCs that operate in 1,707 villages spread across the states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Maharashtra, and they are at the heart of an initiative nurtured by the Dairy Health and Nutrition Initiative India Foundation (DHANII).

DHANII is a nonprofit that works as a delivery and implementation arm for the Tata Dairy Mission initiative, an effort...
GOING WITH THE FLOW

India is the world’s largest producer and consumer of milk, producing 188 million tonnes a year (2018)

Small and marginal farmers contribute 73% to the country’s overall milk production

48% of this milk is consumed locally, 32% is sold in the unorganised sector and 20% is procured by cooperatives and private dairies

THE STORY OF DHANII

81,305 members, 93% of them women, in 5 milk producing companies

1,707 villages in the programme, spread over Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra

An average of 340,000+ kilograms of milk is procured every day

Combined turnover of ₹3.64 billion in 2020-21
by the Tata Trusts to enhance the incomes of milk producers in rural India through capacity building. It also links them to markets and gets them current knowhow in breed improvement and animal health and nutrition. In essence, the Mission is crafted to support what remains a traditional livelihood source for countless households in the country’s rural reaches.

The rearing of livestock has always been an additional livelihood practice for small and marginal farmers in India’s villages, contributing an estimated 15-20% to annual household income. To consume and, if possible, sell milk is the way with poor families owning livestock, and they use this as insurance against the vagaries of agricultural life. Keeping livestock is one thing; making the most of them quite another. That’s the part that DHANII is designed to help with. The Foundation provides dairy farmers with the means and the knowledge to grow healthy livestock, to increase production and distribution of good quality milk and milk products, and to undertake allied activities.

Dairy for income impact
“DHANII was born after we learned, during the course of our livelihood projects in rural India, that a dairy intervention in certain geographies could have a high impact on farmer incomes,” explains Baljinder Saini, regional manager with the Tata Trusts. With technical backing from NDBD Dairy Services (NDS), a not-for-profit company operating under the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), DHANII enabled the setting up of five milk producer companies (MPCs). These entities are owned by the dairy farmers themselves.

The dairy programme has expanded rapidly since its 2016 launch, with the MPCs now procuring an average of 340,000kg of milk per day. The milk is channelled to an institutional buyer, the NDDB-owned Mother Dairy, for a fair price. It is a system that works to the advantage of small sellers like Ms Rajeshwari, who have to function in a milk business milieu quiet different from that in developed countries.

The organised sector dominates in large milk-producing countries in the West. In India, this sector accounts for about 20-30% of
procurement, with the rest being supplied by local milkmen and private players. Rural dairy farmers are often at the mercy of these people, and they are further hindered by their lack of knowledge about modern-day livestock rearing and by their limited access to markets and bank credit.

The dairy cooperative movement was introduced in India in the late 1940s to remedy such problems. MPCs, a more recent phenomenon, go a step further by tilting the scales in favour of milk producers. Unlike in cooperatives, only milk producers can become MPC members, and that minimises external meddling. Importantly, the MPCs belong to their members and they run it with the help of an appointed team of professionals.

Ensuring that their milk maintains its purity, is vital for the

Banking on milk to make a difference

Zulfina Bano was a graduate student when the Sakhi Mahila Milk Production Company (MPC) launched its operations in 2016 in Alwar, Rajasthan. A resident of Ronpur village, she lost little time becoming a member, but soon found out that not everyone was as sanguine as she about the company’s prospects.

“We went to a bank to open savings accounts for Sakhi’s members and the officials there admonished us and sent us back. They said the MPC would run away with our money,” recalls Ms Zulfina. “Now the same officials call and ask if we require any financial assistance.”

The reason is the roaring success of Sakhi, with its membership growing to some 32,000 dairy farmers. The average monthly income of these milk producers has also gone up from ₹3,800 a month to ₹9,600 over a five-year period.

Sakhi finding its own milky way is a source of pride — and valuable income — for Ms Zulfina. “Money earned from milk has enabled me to compete my graduation and do a BEd [bachelor of education] after that,” she says. “My children study in an English-medium school and all of this is self-funded. I didn’t have to borrow a rupee.”

Ms Zulfina plans to buy more cattle and up her milk production to 200 litres a day. She needs funds for this and Sakhi is assisting her in procuring a collateral-free bank loan. Getting the bank’s okay is not going to be an issue. As Sakhi’s chief executive, Dharmendra Chaudhary, puts it, “They have understood the power of 32,000 women.”

Dairy farmer Zulfina Bano, a member of Sakhi MPC, with her husband and child
MPCs. The village pooling points where members sell their produce have machines that display the fat and solid-not-fat (SNF) content of the milk brought in. The price the farmers get is based on the quality of the milk they supply. The machines also exhibit milk rates and payment for the milk procured.

The rates offered by the MPCs are usually higher than what producers get outside, and the difference can add up significantly. “I used to get ₹25-30 per litre before I became a member; now I get around ₹50 per litre,” says Shanti Chaudhary, a member of the Asha MPC in Pali, Rajasthan. “Thanks to this and the nutrition and health services provided by the MPC, my dairy income has doubled to ₹12,000 a month.”

The female factor is built into the DHANII-backed MPCs, all but one of which are exclusively for women members. There are compelling reasons for this. “In villages it is the women who usually take care of livestock, and the extra earnings are very useful to them, especially during emergencies,” says Manjit Kaur, chairperson and director of the Sakhi MPC in Alwar, Rajasthan.

**Setting the standard**

Sakhi, the first MPC set up under DHANII, has won multiple awards for its governance standards. Says Dharmendra Chaudhary, its chief executive: “We help members procure collateral-free loans of up to ₹1 million so they can buy more livestock and increase their incomes. We have also helped them get credit cards and are in the process of securing group and medical insurance for them and their children.”

Mohini Mahanur, a member of the Induja MPC in Nandurangaon in Maharashtra’s Yavatmal district, vouches for the benefits of the programme. “These go beyond the conveniently-located milk pooling points and the timely payments,” she says. “We get cattle food and supplements at subsidised prices; the doorstep artificial insemination services are more cost-effective than elsewhere; we have learned to grow better-quality fodder and veterinary assistance can be easily availed.”

“We explain the science to them and that allows them to develop a long-term perspective on the health of their cattle and the quality and quantity of the milk the animals provide,” says RS Sahota, a productivity enhancement consultant with DHANII. “Knowledge of the right dairy farming practices pays richly over time.”

DHANII has supported the MPCs financially through grants to cover infrastructure for milk collection, bulk milk coolers and operational costs. The MPCs have responded by proving their viability (all of them have reached break-even point). Professional management has played a part here, and one example is the manner in which the Sakhi, Ruhaani and Asha MPCs switched to ghee production when the Covid pandemic saw demand for milk plummet.

DHANII’s objective now is to add institutional clients besides Mother Dairy to its roster. Meanwhile Sakhi, the largest of the MPCs with a presence in more than 600 villages, is going a step further and planning a retail business venture. And there is scope for more. “Our goal is to reach 3,000 villages by 2025,” says Mr Saini.
Naveen Namboothri grew up on a diet of development issues, conservation and stories of the sea. This by itself did not lead to a career in marine ecosystems and marine biology — “That just happened,” he says — but it shaped his worldview and his concerns.

Mr Namboothri serves as the director of Dakshin Foundation, a nonprofit that works towards fishermen’s wellbeing and developing solutions for sustainable coastal and marine development in India. He speaks here with Christabelle Noronha about the multiple challenges facing coastal communities in the time of climate change, the importance to coral reefs and the criticality of saving our oceans from the excesses of humankind. Edited excerpts from the interview:

What sparked your interest in conservation and marine biology and how did these become your life’s calling?
A lot of it started when I was young. My father was working in the development sector and my sister got involved in conservation. Most serious conversations at home were centred around the conflict between...
development and conservation interests. But my moving into this space in marine ecosystems was not by design; it just happened.

As with many others in the field, it started with a fascination for oceans and marine life. Once you dip your face into the waters of the sea without fear of drowning and enjoy what you see there, any person would get hooked. I remember watching Jacques-Yves Cousteau in a series called *Secrets of the Sea* on Doordarshan and being enthralled. Later on, fate made marine biology the focus. It all came together quite well.

The recently-released report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) paints a grim picture of what's in store for the world. Are we on the brink of catastrophe?

I think it's difficult to generalise across the globe or even across coastal and marine spaces in India. The impact of this is going to affect different communities and geographies differently. You don't really need to read the IPCC report to know what's happening; if you are living on the coast, you will feel it firsthand.

The economic and ecological consequences of all these changes are being felt on an everyday basis. Take the Lakshadweep group of islands, one of the most susceptible regions in terms of climate change. These islands are pretty much at level with the ocean, in some places even below it. Research by colleagues studying the marine ecosystem there indicate that the main reason Lakshadweep remains habitable is the ring of corals that protects it. Climate change is severely affecting the health of these coral reefs and, in turn, placing its inhabitants at high risk.

I have strong hopes for marine ecosystems, though. I have always believed — and there is sporadic evidence for this — that marine ecosystems are much more resilient than their terrestrial counterparts. They have the ability to bounce back if we show the intent and are ready to work collectively to remove the major stressors on oceans.

Unlike with terrestrial spaces, we still don’t know a lot about oceans and coasts (quite often fish are not even perceived as wildlife). We can’t see things in the oceans visually or perceive them like we can on land. Pollution in the sea, for example, does not have the same immediacy as that on land. That disconnect exists but what’s churning in the seas has huge consequence for human survival at multiple levels.

What happens on land has some consequences for the oceans, but the influence is much stronger the other way around. Oceans play a critical role in controlling local and global climate. Our agriculture, fisheries, development and the lives of millions of coastal people depend on what happens in our oceans.

**How badly are coastal communities being affected?**

Coastal communities are especially vulnerable, particularly in countries like India (where nearly 250 million people live within 50km of the coastline).
A lot of fisherfolk are directly in the line of fire. India’s east coast is one of the most vulnerable globally, in terms of the storms and surges it faces.

Importantly, in many parts of India, fishing communities still do not have rights over the land where they have been living for generations, making them prone to displacement and other vulnerabilities. There are also the ever-growing pressures of development along the coastline and climate change-induced storms and cyclones.

We can perhaps adjust and prepare for a gradual sea-level rise and figure out how to live with it. Development of our oceans and coasts is important and that must translate into better stewardship of our blue resources. Similar to the green economy, the blue economy model talks about improvement of human wellbeing and social equity while reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

How can India do right by its marine ecosystem in terms of policymaking and drawing on traditional practices?

India has some of the most productive seas and coastlines in the world and can support the livelihoods and nutritional security of millions. However, over the past few decades, fishing has become increasingly unregulated and inequitable for our fisherfolk. Mechanisation and efficient fishing technologies — particularly the introduction of trawlers — have created huge inequities in how the marine commons are shared and accessed by coastal communities.

What India needs is to move the needle on the social development side for fishing communities; have a more decentralised, participatory and transparent approach to fisheries management. We have to start focusing on the sustainability of fish stocks rather than maximising production. India’s latest marine policy acknowledges some of these issues plaguing our coastal communities and ecosystems, but converting policy into practice requires a lot more commitment, capacity and hard work.
How much of a danger is the plastisphere, the synthetic ecosystem evolving in our oceans? And does this danger manifest itself more in the Indian Ocean?

It has become very pervasive. Some of our studies in the Andamans have shown the presence of microplastics even in planktonic communities that form the base of the marine food chain. If this is the case in remote areas, one can only imagine what it would be in places where human activity is much higher. There is definitely a huge problem of plastics in our oceans and there should be plenty more incentives to not use it. There have to be alternatives that are economically and ecologically viable.

Countries such as India seem to be caught in a climate change bind as they try to balance the need for development with the threat this poses to the planet and their own people. How do we walk this tightrope, or is it a bogus choice to begin with?

The popular articulation that development and environmental concerns cannot go hand in hand has been extremely unproductive and problematic. This is an articulation that nudges governments to push for inequitable and unsustainable development models. India needs to articulate clearly what kind of development it envisages. What is it that the people really need and aspire for? How can institutions that operate at the grassroots be provided more agency and capacity to address local issues?

Basic human development indices such as income, education and health remain the fundamental issues to be tackled at the grassroots and we need to focus on improving these. Development is not necessarily achieved
through high-investment and infrastructure-based projects that have huge ecological and economic consequences for the marginalised.

Development has to be context-specific; you cannot have one development policy or framework that is applied across all geographies and cultures. There is so much imbedded inequity in our midst that it’s vital to first try and define these at the ground level to bring about equitable, sustainable and long-lasting change.

**Though the devastation climate change is causing in India is evident, there isn’t much concern about it in the politics of our country. How can civil society and the voting population contribute in changing this reality?**

Topics like sustainability, conservation and climate change still remain conversations that are pretty much limited to the urban elite and the middle class; they do not trickle down to the poor of India, for whom such issues have real-life consequences. This is not to say they are not aware of these issues or have no opinion on them, but that they are never part of these conversations.

Environmental issues need to be mainstreamed into politics and should drive political agendas. That this is not being done in India, where a large part of the population depends on nature-based livelihoods, is a huge missed opportunity. There are a few young leaders talking about environmental issues and making it mainstream. We need to give them more power and support.

Environmental issues don’t seem to be an integral part of development planning. The cost here — the damage caused by a flood, for instance — is shared by people. That may explain why environmental issues are central to politics in many countries, particularly in Europe. That’s the sort of political shift India needs. It’s time to stop assuming that solutions are vested only in people who have power or are from a certain strata of society. Every citizen should have a say in climate change-related matters.

**What’s your vision — and hope — for our world, its environment and its ecology in, say, 2050?**

First, we have to rethink and reimagine what we as humans, as a collective, are aspiring for. Our youth are our real hope going forward and this is particularly true for a country such as India with its youth-heavy demography. We have to build a generation of environmentally conscious and empowered youth, and we need mobilisation at the grassroots. All of this starts with our youth.

As older people, we are already fixed in our thinking and our ways, and hard set with our philosophies and our outlook. But with youth there is hope that they can bring about change. If this becomes a global movement, it is not hard to imagine an equitable and sustainable world where the needs and aspirations of all are met. ■

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“Importantly, in many parts of India fishing communities still do not have rights over the land where they have been living for generations, making them prone to displacement and other vulnerabilities.”
More than 200,000 women and adolescent girls from eight states power a movement that is helping shed the stigmas attached to menstruation

There used to be a time when a perfectly natural bodily function got Vaishali Aatram in a tizzy. The cause and culprit was menstruation, that monthly caller half of all human beings have to put up with for a big part of their lives.

“I used to feel dirty and untouchable while menstruating because I considered myself impure during these phases,” says the 28-year-old from Indrathana village in Maharashtra’s Yavatmal district. That was before a programme centred on menstruation and how to manage it, came to be embedded in Ms Aatram’s community. “No living separately anymore for me and my daughter,” says Ms Aatram.

For Somi Bai, a 42-year-old from Basantgarh village in the Sirohi district of Rajasthan, learning about and understanding menstruation better, has meant a kind of normalcy. “I don’t fear its onset now,” she says. “Importantly, my relationship with my daughter is different; we talk openly about menstruation.”

That’s a crucial aspect in how the ‘menstrual hygiene management’ (MHM) programme supported by the Tata Trusts, plays out for more than 200,000 women and adolescent girls spread across 1,500 villages in eight states. And quite a few men as well.
Arun Mishra attended a counselling session organised by the MHM team for men in his village, Rampur Paida in Uttar Pradesh’s Shravasti district, and it was an eye-opener. From being unaware even of what his wife, Sangeeta, had to go through during her periods, the 29-year-old Mr Mishra has progressed to becoming a votary of hygienic menstrual practices, sharing poems and write-ups to break the silence surrounding the subject. “It’s not just the woman’s responsibility to eradicate the stigma around menstruation,” he insists.

Assisting and driving the MHM cause is a 300-strong sisterhood of sakhis (or companions) who have been entrusted with the task of taking the menstruation message to village communities.

“The sakhis provide the women and adolescent girls they interact with, a safe space to share their menstrual journey stories,” says Divyang Waghela, who heads the Tata Water Mission, under which the MHM programme operates (see Companions in a common cause on page 59).

And a journey it certainly is for many of those caught up in the swirl of taboos and restrictions that come — unspoken but clear — that come with menstruation.

Understanding menstruation and how it can be managed properly — that’s the goal of the MHM effort, launched in 2016 with pilot projects in Uttarakhand and Rajasthan. The need for such an intervention stemmed from the feedback the Tata Trusts team received from women while implementing its extensive water and sanitation projects.

**Usual suspects**
The primary concerns were the usual: dealing with menstruation when using common toilets and living in cramped conditions, and the difficulties posed while trying to dispose of used sanitary napkins. Lesser said the better about the branding associated with menstruation, still viewed in numerous parts of India as interludes of ‘impurity’ for women and girls.

Normalising menstruation through dialogue, openness and sharing of information, not just among women and
girls but also their families, was a necessary opening thrust for the initiative. This began with a behaviour-change communication campaign aimed at breaking the barriers surrounding menstruation.

The pilot project went off well enough for the MHM programme to be scaled up, in 2018, to six more states: Jharkhand, Gujarat, Assam, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Here the Trusts partnered their associate organisations and government bodies for implementation, with the focus remaining on women and adolescents and issues such as awareness, access, attitudes and the adoption of hygienic practices.

**Creating awareness**

Multiple approaches are employed to create awareness. The *sakhis* talk to women and adolescent girls — and men and boys too — through community interventions and outreach sessions in schools. A range of topics are covered, from reproductive systems and premenstrual syndrome to menopause and nutrition.

The awareness sessions follow a participatory, conversation-based approach. Bringing men and boys into this conversational circle is important given how influential the man of the house can be in creating a supportive environment for women and girls within families where patriarchy is as rampant as it is traditional.

Perseverance has been the key in making change possible, and in several situations it has been men who have become ardent champions of menstrual hygiene awareness. “My husband is now aware of the problems that I face and he even buys sanitary napkins for me,” says Savita Tudu, a 20-year-old from Chanaro village in Jharkhand’s Hazaribag district. “Also, knowing about ‘safe days’ helps me with family planning.”

Periods-related products and the safe disposal of sanitary waste are emphasised in the MHM initiative. The Trusts’ team ensures access to good quality and eco-friendly menstrual absorbents — sanitary pad production units have been established in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra — and, additionally, teaches women and adolescent girls how to stitch their own cloth pads.

The safe disposal of personal hygiene products is ensured through *matka* (earthen pot) incinerators. These *matkas*, buried in specially-prepared pits in the ground, ensure that when used menstrual products are burnt in them, the resultant smoke and ash are absorbed by the soil. This unique disposal solution, which prevents used sanitary napkins from going into landfills or being burned in the open, has been one of the MHM project’s successes.

For the immediate beneficiaries, the programme has provided a platform to get talking about menstruation. “Deep-rooted myths about menstruation usually deter women and adolescent girls from questioning them,” says Mr Waghela. “The programme has made a difference, in that respect.”

The MHM team has its hands full with plans for the future. These include more awareness sessions, setting up cloth-pad production units in other states and working on new technologies to dispose of used menstrual products. Also on the anvil are a further strengthening of partnerships with government agencies and establishing an academy to train frontline workers and school authorities.

One thing’s for sure, in the present and with what lies ahead — for the women and adolescents touched by the MHM programme, there’s no going back to the red alert days of ostracism and prejudice.

_by Priyanka Hasangadi_
Like most women around her, Sonal Kanwar found menstruation an uncomfortable topic to discuss. But that all changed in September 2018 after the 25-year-old from Lotana village in Rajasthan’s Sirohi district joined the ‘menstrual hygiene management’ (MHM) programme of the Tata Trusts.

It happened after Ms Kanwar began training to become a sakhi (or companion) in the programme. The course changed her perspective. “Not only did I realise there’s nothing wrong with talking openly about menstruation, I also learned why it’s important for women to do so,” says Ms Kanwar.

In distant Assam, fellow-sakhi Malaya Das voices a similar sentiment. “The training cleared up several misconceptions in my mind about menstruation,” says the 22-year-old from Dokoha village in Nalbari district. “And people’s attitudes have been different since I became a sakhi. I’m treated with more respect and my family feels proud of me. Women approach me frequently for advice on menstruation problems and it feels good to see them talk about this with their families.”

Ms Kanwar and Ms Das are among some 200 sakhis in the MHM initiative. The sakhis play a pivotal role in the MHM programme as frontline workers who are often the initial, even primary, source of information in these villages about menstruation.

Not everybody takes kindly to the programme’s prodding. “Once we had a man who was enraged after we approached him and his wife for menstruation counselling,” says Ms Kanwar. “He kept shouting at his wife and threatened us with a stick.”

Companions in a common cause

Sunita Devi, a sakhi from Maunda village in Uttar Pradesh’s Lucknow district, discusses the benefits of cloth pads with women from her village.
Leaning on learning of a different kind

An experiential learning programme is helping teachers and students rediscover the world of knowledge

The purpose of education is to prepare students for life, not for examinations. Experiential learning opens that door,” says Vividh Gupta, principal of the Bal Bhavan Public School in Mayur Vihar, Delhi, about a still-evolving system of pedagogy that’s as far as can be from the rarely interesting and mostly mechanical practices of classroom education in India.

Experiential learning does what its conventional classroom counterpart has struggled to in this country: encourage teachers and students to collaborate in unravelling and understanding the world around them. Absorbing knowledge through discovery is the norm here. The teaching is lively, and students immerse themselves in opportunities to explore, discuss, reflect and discern.

“Experiential learning creates a joyful teaching-learning environment, one that is
conducive for students looking to imbibe 21st-century skills, and become successful in life,” says Suma Paul, principal of the Assisi Vidyaniketan Public School in Kochi. A teacher reading from a textbook in a drab monologue with students as passive pupils — the factory model of education where school assembly lines churn out students — that’s not the experiential learning way.

Sometimes described as ‘learning through reflection on doing’, experiential learning is a lot more. It’s hands-on learning, active learning, action learning, free-choice learning and cooperative learning. All of this come together to bring out the essence of it: learning from experience. The focus is on the process of learning rather than the product of learning.

Reworked for the times
The concept itself is as old as the hills; Aristotle wrote in 350 BC that we “learn by doing.” But experiential learning as we know it now, emerged in the early 1970s. It has been refined in the years since to become a high-quality educational standard around the world and in India too. It’s no accident that the Indian government’s National Policy of Education 2020, recommended experiential learning as a way to improve teaching outcomes and student learning.

Experiential learning in schools is a key transformation measure being employed in the collective effort to reform India’s ailing education system. The Tata Trusts have pitched in by creating an online course in experiential learning for schoolteachers affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the autonomous, national-level entity that comes under the union government’s education ministry.

Launched in 2020 in partnership with CBSE, the course has, thus far, opened the doors of experiential learning to more than

No wrong answers
If experiential learning could be explained through a Bollywood film, the Aamir Khan-starrer *Taare Zameen Par* comes closest. The movie explores the life and world of Ishaan (played by Darshel Safary), an eight-year-old with undiagnosed dyslexia. Ishaan’s art teacher helps him overcome the reading disorder and learning becomes an enjoyable experience for the child.

In a similar manner, the experiential learning approach aims to centre the educational environment around students rather than textbooks and a rote education formula. Students have control over the pace of learning and the methods used, and they get to develop the skills they need to make the best of the knowledge they acquire.

Students are encouraged to evaluate, think critically, make decisions and master knowledge by constructing it. “It’s not *padhai* (learning) in the conventional sense of the term,” says Sanjukta Mukherjee, assistant headmistress at the RN Podar School in Mumbai.

A lesson on the year 2020, for instance, encourages children to talk about the Coronavirus pandemic, identify words and terms that have acquired currency during the time and make prototypes of eco-friendly masks.

As part of the science curriculum, the students learned about the fibres and fabrics used to make these masks; in maths class, they calculated the dimensions of the materials used; in language class, they expressed themselves through poems and essays; and in social sciences, they explored the history of masks in Indian culture.

“Students like working with their hands, they like talking to one another,” says Kalyani Guha, a teacher with Delhi Public School in Nagpur. “Experiential learning pushes students to work together, research and find answers. The answers they arrive at may be different and yet they are all correct.”
281,000 teachers across the country. The initiative is driven by teachers who are more than just teachers; they are facilitators, subject experts, coaches, standard setters and evaluators.

The big stumbling block before any of this could get started, was that the teachers involved needed to be taught the new technique of teaching. The challenge CBSE faced was that most of the teachers in its 24,000-plus affiliated schools, needed support and further exposure to impart experiential learning. Moreover, there was a dearth of quality training modules.

The mandate before CBSE and the Trusts was four-fold: develop an online module on experiential learning; mount the module on DIKSHA, the National Council for Education Research and Training’s pan-India platform; provide an implementation plan and conduct an evaluation study of the overall programme.

For the Trusts, the collaboration with CBSE aligned well with their goals in the education sphere, particularly the project’s potential to bring about positive change at scale (there are more than 1 million teachers in CBSE-affiliated schools).

The core team for the initiative included experts from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and the Ahmedabad-based Mahatma Gandhi International School. A text module on experiential learning developed by CBSE served as the foundation for the course, but merely digitising this would not have translated into quality teaching and learning in the classroom.

**Running on plenty**

The online course needed to incorporate interactivity, fashion opportunities to engage with classroom scenarios, allow scope for reflection on practise, build communities of practise and provide ease of learning through technology platforms. The project team tapped teachers to understand their practical difficulties and conducted a pilot with 30 teachers during a development phase that lasted a year.

What emerged was a four-hour-long
course with a step-by-step approach to experiential learning. Resting on the principles of learning through reflection, practise and building on prior knowledge, the course incorporates elements such as joyful learning, student feedback and teacher facilitation, while plugging into multimedia tools and high-quality classroom videos shot with real teachers, with all its hits, misses and moments of discovery.

“Unless teachers engage in self-enquiry about their teaching and apply theory to practice, then come back with questions, discuss their experience, get supportive feedback and go back to the classroom with renewed ideas, the loop of learning remains incomplete for them,” explains Bobby Abrol, who leads the teacher development programme at the Tata Trusts. “We have concentrated on taking these teachers through the entire loop.”

The course had a countrywide unveiling through an orientation webinar organised for some 5,000 principals and hub leaders, followed by 10 webinars to support teachers (these attracted about 60,000 teachers on YouTube). The course is now available to the entire network of CBSE schools through DIKSHA, which has been adopted by education administrations across the country and serves millions of learners and teachers.

The 65% completion rate for the course is a lot higher than the average for similar online courses. The success has prompted CBSE and the Trusts to develop an advanced version of the programme. It’s through the voices of teachers, though, that the course and its positives shine the brightest.

“I was a traditional teacher and I’ve changed so much after attending the experiential learning course,” says Namita Agarwal, a teacher with the Palace School in Jaipur. “My advice to all teachers is to please join the course. It will help your students and it will help you.”

By Samod Sarngan
Voices from the cold

The 1947 Partition Archive chronicles the oral narratives of those torn apart by the largest and bloodiest forced migration in recorded history

O cartographic incision in the history of the South Asian subcontinent has been more painful and agonising than the Radcliffe Line. Named after British lawyer and parliamentarian Cyril Radcliffe, this is the infamous divide that led to the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947. It was a partition birthed in chaos, bloodshed and misery, separating 90 million people and 175,000 square miles of territory.

The cost in human suffering was colossal — between 10 and 20 million people were displaced, anywhere from several hundred thousand to around 2 million men, women and children lost their lives in the violence that followed, and this cleaving of land left a legacy of mistrust and enmity.

The partition of India and Pakistan spawned countless stories of tragedy and of hope, told and untold. It is the telling of these stories that validates the 1947 Partition Archive, an initiative that records the history of the division through the oral narratives of those scarred or touched by it. This is an effort to collect and preserve remembrances of a period that remains relatively under-documented, a gathering together of plaintive voices and melancholic memories.
Most partition stories that have passed down through the generations tend to elicit horror and tears. But there are also heart-warming tales of courage, kindness and generosity. The importance of capturing these first-person narratives before they were lost forever was what spurred Guneeta Singh Bhalla, the granddaughter of a Sikh refugee, to start a project that has grown into the 1947 Partition Archive.

**Volunteers at the vanguard**

The collection of narratives kicked off in 2010 as a homegrown volunteer project, steered from a tiny office on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, where Ms Bhalla was then based. With the help of donor funding and volunteer story gatherers, the Archive has grown into a one-of-a-kind, crowd-sourced digital record of personal narratives that shed much-needed light on pre-partition life, the partition experience, the post-partition landscape and much more.

“The Archive helps us learn of a time when the subcontinent was more diverse in its makeup and our cities were more cosmopolitan,” says Ms Bhalla. “It helps us understand how we got to where we are in terms of polarisation, and it helps us come to terms with the ‘origin wound’ of our current divisions so that we may learn to heal and move on into a more accepting future.”

The Tata Trusts began supporting the Archive in December 2018 with the aim of bringing this rich resource to three Indian universities. “The 1947 Partition Archive, which has more than 9,800 first-person accounts in 36 languages, interested us for many reasons,” explains Deepika Sorabjee, who heads arts and culture at the Trusts. “It is a unique archive of a unique event that hasn’t received the attention and research it deserves.”

“These histories will help us...
understand many issues that have remained unexplored so far: the impact on the mental health of those who lived through that traumatic time, cultural commonalities and the post-independence effect on their practice in now-separate regions, and the connection with archives of similar national upheavals around the world. Giving access of these sensitive narratives to students and faculty needed a programme that respected the people who told their ‘stories’ and functioned in a well-supervised format,” adds Ms Sorabjee.

Promoting exploration, introspection and a deeper understanding of partition is the objective of this project, which followed a three-step agenda:

- Setting up physical access points for students and scholars at three Indian universities
- Training librarians in best practices and protocols to handle partition narratives with sensitive content
- Offering 26 fellowships to encourage student and faculty researchers to engage with the history of partition.

Executed as a pilot project that concluded in November 2021, the initiative has enabled 16 student scholars and 10 faculty researchers to access the Archive through Delhi University, Ashoka University (Sonepat), and Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar). The archive’s long-term goals include adding ‘partition studies’ to the curriculum of Indian universities.

“The access project facilitates researchers and helps prevent the erasure of identities and histories. It highlights heroism and helps in healing wounds,” says research grantee Snober Sataravala, whose paper is an example of the quality and depth of the studies that have been generated by the project.

Ms Sataravala’s research study, titled ‘Safe passage and shelter during the Partition of India: Exploring oral histories to understand the minorities connect’, examines how partition witnesses remember and articulate their experiences, and how they adapt socially, culturally and economically.

That the Archive is not all about mayhem and misery comes across clearly in the work of Ms Sataravala, who looks at the role of Parsees in assisting people, as well as the contributions of neutral Indian minorities such as Jews and Anglo-Indians in providing safe passage to Hindus and Muslims caught on either side of the Radcliffe Line. ‘Mapping the language of victimhood: Violence and suffering in the 1947 Partition’, a study by research grantee Ankur Datta from South Asian University, explores phrases and ideas that come up in

Iqra Raza, one of three librarians trained under the project, at Archive access point at Delhi University
witness testimonies and how they travel down in time to affect the future.

‘Memory, identity and resilience in oral narratives of East Pakistani refugees in West Bengal’, by Sumallya Mukhopadhyay, studies the stories of displaced people in West Bengal and the hybridisation of their culture. Mr Mukhopadhyay discovered that the word ‘refugee’ was not considered derogatory by the refugees themselves; rather, it was worn as a badge of pride for mobilisation in their newly-adopted homelands.

A sensitive question
Ms Bhalla and her team faced unexpected roadblocks while executing the project, not least with the pandemic, which affected the original idea of having researchers and grantees physically access the archives at the three universities. There were technology and logistics issues, too. But trickiest of all, given the sensitive nature of the data, was ensuring safe access of the Archive material to the grantees and researchers.

The project required the framing of protocols for screening the researchers and handling the recordings. This was uncharted territory. The Archive set up an advisory committee of 15 experts from around the world to guide the endeavour and the project team pushed hard to make it work optimally. Work is currently underway on adapting the model to take it to other universities in the subcontinent.

The abiding insight offered by the Archive is that there are no winners or losers in war and political conflict, just victims and perpetrators — on both sides. “We wanted to move away from the oversimplified ‘us vs them’ narrative and create an opportunity to understand the inner mechanics of mass communal violence,” says Ms Bhalla.

By Priya Mirchandani

 whilst teaching Cracking India, written by Karachi-born Bapsi Sidhwa, I was fascinated by a mention of the protagonist’s mother hoarding cans of gasoline to help people escape. Due to the autobiographical elements in the novel, I wondered if the account was true. Turns out it was.

The oral histories that I accessed through the 1947 Partition Archive reveal that women galvanised into action to help refugees, even setting up safe homes for abandoned women. These homes trained the abandoned women to be self-reliant, to stitch clothes and make handicrafts which they could then sell. Among the stories I came across was that of a commanding officer who rescued women who were raped and then abandoned by their families — and he requested his officers to marry them.

Central to my research study was preserving the dignity and privacy of the survivors who shared their personal narratives. Each and every one of their stories is unique in its contribution. What is important, as a researcher, is that I realised there were other kinds of minorities who also needed to be acknowledged, be it the physically challenged, those in institutions due to mental health issues, orphaned children or abandoned women.

So many of the narratives are sensitive, like army officers after partition still reaching out across borders to help one another. The political and geographical division did not impinge on the personal, and that is something I would like people to take away.

Snober Sataravala, one of 26 research scholars to receive the Tata Trusts-1947 Partition Archive research grant, writes about her experience of hearing the voices recorded for the project.

Snober Sataravala records the account of a partition witness

Personal and unique

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Moving on

Mission Gaurav was a blessing for 1.37 million migrant families during the pandemic, but its true impact goes beyond the numbers and the immediate need.

In the aftermath of the economic devastation that followed the first set of lockdowns in India, it seemed the pandemic would extract the biggest sacrifice from one of the most marginalised communities of the country: migrant workers. Stranded and abandoned, the vulnerability stalking the previously invisible existence of this demographic was suddenly thrust into view.

The daily indignities and troubles of migrant workers, magnified by a virus that destroyed lives and livelihoods, the numerous stories of ruin and heartbreak; and the sheer scale of a tragedy that was mostly ignored — these formed the background that sparked Mission Gaurav, a programme launched by the Tata Trusts during the pandemic to reach out to those most in need.

Spread over six states and administered through 15 implementing organisations, Mission Gaurav works to ease the woes of migrants caught in the Covid crisis, people such as Sasidhar Bariha and his wife, Subidha, from Khurda district in Odisha. The Barihas could barely make ends meet, even in better times, with their meagre wages as brick kiln labourers. By June 2020, the couple were back home and, with no...
work or wages, at the edge of an abyss. Having someone lend them a hand was a lifesaver for the Barihas.

Mission Gaurav has supported more than 1.37 million migrant families like the Barihas with compensation or by providing them an alternative means of livelihood. This was organised through partner organisations in the field and shramik mitras (community mobilisers). One such shramik mitra is Smaraneeka Panda, who helped the Barihas find part-time work under a government employment scheme.

Where there’s a scheme
The Barihas had at least each other to lean on. But there were so many others who had to fend for themselves. Dolly Bai from Mandsaur district in Madhya Pradesh, who belongs to a scheduled class community that already faces discrimination, lost her husband in an accident in June 2020 and was left with little hope of survival. She found a benefactor in Jan Sahas, a Mission Gaurav partner organisation in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

Jan Sahas got Ms Dolly registered under a government scheme that entitled her and her family to aid and pension. She managed to get ₹400,000 as accidental death compensation for her husband’s demise, a cash benefit of ₹5,000 to conduct his funeral and ₹600 every month as pension. “We were down and out and I don’t know what we would have done without Jan Sahas,” she says.

Silicosis is the villain
The lockdown has been tough on migrant workers and their families, no matter what sector they work in or which village they call home. Badaami Devi’s story is harsher than most. A 40-year-old widow and mother of three from Suhava village in Rajasthan’s Ajmer district, she was struggling to make ends meet and pay off the debts of her deceased husband, yet another victim of the dreaded silicosis.

A deadly lung disease caused by exposure to silica dust, silicosis is rampant in Rajasthan’s many stone-crushing units. Ms Badaami’s husband, Ameen, used to earn ₹250 a day doing this life-threatening labour, one of countless in a sector where work is contractual, informal and bereft of any sort of health insurance. These workers often contract silicosis and their families have precious little to fall back on when the inevitable fatality happens.

After her husband lost his job due to poor health, Ms Badaami spent everything she had on his treatment. When he died in 2017, she was left in dire straits. Ms Badaami began working at a stone-crushing unit but could not get regular work and was paid even less than her husband. Soon enough, she too contracted silicosis. “I had no money and I had no hope,” she says. Mission Gaurav was a godsend for Ms Badaami, whose plight came to the attention of the Grameen Evam Samajik Vikas Sanstha, a local partner in the programme, when it set up a migrant relief camp in Ajmer. A community mobiliser with the Mission helped Ms Badaami file her claim for compensation for her husband’s death. It took several rounds of government offices and persistent effort before she finally received ₹300,000 as compensation.

“I would have never known about the compensation or the claim process were it not for these people,” says a grateful Ms Badaami.
Although the Tata Trusts have long years of experience with migrant communities, the pandemic has created an unprecedented situation and there was no readymade roadmap to show a way out. “Migrant families were coming home under a cloud of uncertainty and no guarantee of income,” says Shikha Srivastava, who heads the urban habitat and migration portfolio at the Trusts.

The pandemic also exposed the prejudice that migrant communities face — from employers, from upper castes and the better off in their villages as well as from the establishment. Over and above providing returning migrants with monetary support, Mission Gaurav also worked to combat entrenched biases in the system and create a sense of dignity for migrant workers.

The Mission also set its mind to providing migrants with livelihood opportunities and, importantly, on delivering government benefits. “People at the bottom of the pyramid have a lot of difficulty accessing the benefits due to them,” says Ms Srivastava. “Getting families their due was the first step in rehabilitating them.”

This meant mobilising local partnerships and networks and bringing them all under the banner of a single entity. The states worst hit by the returning-migrants emergency — Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — were targeted to maximise the Mission’s impact, and a flexible implementation framework was put in place.

Localised support
To carry out the groundwork, the Trusts tapped their vast network of shramik mitras and Apna Seva Kendras (ASKs), resource centres that enable migrants to access government entitlements, legal services and training in skills development. “We took the ASK model and made it more agile,” says Ms Srivastava. “Instead of migrants coming to an ASK centre, we sent mobilisers to the villages to collect data and help families get their benefits.”

Mission Gaurav was conducted in a single phase from August 2020 to May 2021. During this period, the Mission has gone beyond addressing the immediate needs of migrants while working to build their resilience to withstand future shocks.

With lockdowns being lifted and migrant labour flooding back to the cities and towns, Mission Gaurav is folding back its areas of intervention. But that’s not the end of the road for the effort. “Mission Gaurav taught us to be proud of the work [migrants] do and to make them feel that too. That is its lasting imprint,” says Ms Srivastava.

Arundhuti Dasgupta
A data-driven community development project along the Jamshedpur-Kalinganagar corridor, has been a pathbreaker for 450 villages in Jharkhand and Odisha

Among the many meanings of the word ‘road’ is ‘a way or means to achieve something’. When applied to the Jamshedpur-Kalinganagar Development Corridor (JKDC), or Raah project, it is a trailblazer that promises to improve the lives and future of more than 100,000 people in some 450 villages of the two states.

A collaborative effort involving the Tata Trusts and Tata Steel Foundation (TSF), Raah covers a 280-km stretch between Jamshedpur in Jharkhand and Kalinganagar in Odisha, and runs through some of India’s poorest regions. Raah translates as road in Hindi and that is a tag appropriate for attachment to an initiative that seeks to create a pathway that balances conventionally understood development with the all-round needs of underserved communities.

Launched in 2018 and located in the expanse between Tata Steel’s plants in Jamshedpur and Kalinganagar, JKDC Raah is an unusual endeavour in more ways than one. It employs a corridor approach to encompass a greater number of beneficiaries; it is centred on community participation; and it uses data to effect transformation at the grassroots level.

The need for the corridor is driven by harsh ground realities: it sits in an extended area that has always been classified as backward, with human development...
indices that are among the worst in the country. “JKDC Raah is in the zone of National Highway 20, and this highway has impacted people’s lives in terms of bringing positive change as well as throwing up challenges,” explains Paresh Manohar, a programme officer with the Tata Trusts.

“JKDC envisages creating a first-of-its-kind comprehensive development corridor that demonstrates to the world how industry and communities can jointly and harmoniously prosper,” says Debdoot Mohanty, head, TSF.

**Survey for surety**

The initiative started with a mapping of the corridor to get a clear picture of the socio-economic, demographic, cultural and environmental status of the people and places it touches. A survey pinpointed households and businesses in the project area, which includes 72 panchayats (village councils) in the East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum and Seraikela Kharsawan districts of Jharkhand, and the Jajpur and Keonjhar districts of Odisha.

The findings of this survey have guided the design of the JKDC project and the route it has taken, particularly with reference to local communities. Data mapping has aided in planning and decision-making at the village level, where the focus is on engaging with villagers.

The project adopts a bottom-up approach, placing the community at its centre, and its design gives all stakeholders — local communities, village councils, elected representatives and government — a place and a role in the development journey that is being catalysed.

A participatory planning framework has resulted in village communities having a big say at every stage. “The data-driven approach we have selected takes into consideration the specific needs of the community rather than allocating resources based on any arbitrary generalisation of their requirements,” says Mr Manohar.

The data-collection tool and dashboard in the initiative enable community-driven information gathering and easy access. A vital factor here has been the streamlining of gram panchayat development plans (GPDPs), which are statutory documents created at the village council level to reflect the needs of rural communities. Village development plans are vetted by village councils before going
to district administrations to become part of the GPDPs.

“Till now, elected members of gram panchayats relied on their own insights to address issues; the absence of village-level data made it difficult to prioritise these issues,” says Dipantari Sardar, head of the Tudi village council in Jharkhand. “JKDC Raah and the data it has unearthed, will help in identifying and reaching out to marginalised groups.”

DELTA connection

The data collection for the project was done by more than 550 village volunteers and field coordinators, who were trained to use smartphones and an app called DELTA (data, evaluation, learning, technology and analysis) that has been employed by the Trusts for their data-governance programmes. The approach builds on the Trusts’ experience of designing and utilising the DELTA framework to empower communities to contribute towards their own development.

Besides the two state governments, TSF and the Trusts have been supported by several partners in getting the project up to speed. Plenty of the work here has been concentrated on building bridges with the community and multiple facets have been addressed for the purpose: understanding traditional practices, preserving and reviving local arts and culture, staging kala jathas (street plays), holding village sporting events and even charting the region’s biodiversity.

The results of the JKDC Raah effort are already visible on the ground, with 72 GPDPs having been finalised. This would not have been possible without the backing of a host of entities — among them civil society organisations, educational institutions, the donor community and the private sector.

Kishore Rathod

Data makes a difference

Programmes in the data-driven governance (DDG) portfolio of the Tata Trusts aim to strengthen rural and urban decision-making systems through the use of information and technology. The Trusts have been providing functional and technical support to the central government and a few state governments in carrying out data-intensive planning as a means to support social development and to improve governance mechanisms.

The DDG framework employed by the Trusts is called DELTA (data, evaluation, learning, technology and analysis), and on-ground surveys are its bread and butter. Beginning with a single gram panchayat (village council) in 2015, the DDG footprint now extends across 85 districts in 27 states, covering over 2.5 million people.

Another model that the Trusts employ is DELTA-plus, which aims to smoothen last-mile linkages in rural reaches while providing direct benefits to about 56,000 households. The DDG team has trained some 500 government administrative officers in using data for better decision-making, and nearly 5,600 volunteers, drawn from villages, in digital data collection.

The Trusts have forged several state- and central-level collaborations through its DDG initiatives, most prominently with the Maharashtra government for its ‘village social transformation mission’ and with NITI Aayog, the Indian government’s public policy think tank, for its ‘transformation of aspirational districts’ programme.
GOODBYE SLUM, HELLO HOME

Before-and-after images of the recast childcare centre in Tulsitola slum in Rourkela. (Top right) this transformed open space in the Satasingha area in Keonjhar is an example of the Mission’s emphasis on the living environment as a whole.
Whether with a meagre dwelling or a sumptuous abode, making a home of one’s house is a universal human desire. That’s easier said than done for some. One in six people in urban India lives in informal settlements clustered in slums that are unfit for habitation.

The Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission, or ‘Jaga Mission’ — a three-year-old partnership between the Odisha government and the Tata Trusts — is an example of how the urban poor can be supported with decent housing in an environment that’s conducive to living and their well-being.

Thanks to the Mission, more than 65,000 families now have land rights; some 25,000 households have been aided in building permanent houses; and 550 slums in 28 urban local bodies have been recast with basic services and infrastructure, and integrated with main city areas.

The Jaga Mission is part of the Tata Trusts’ urban habitat initiatives, which have benefitted close to 300,000 people spread over 116 urban local bodies in five states of India.

Compiled by Kainaz Mistry
Household surveys were conducted and community meetings held before any plans were implemented. The great enabler for the Mission is a landmark legislation enacted by the state government in 2017: the Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act. Rather than see slum-dwellers as encroachers, this law — the first of its kind in India — seeks to settle them on land they already occupy.
Lively play areas for children are an important part of the project, which has been a revelation in more ways than one for Odisha, a rapidly urbanising state that has nearly 3,000 slums in and around the periphery of its cities and towns.
Refurbishing has changed the face of this lane (top and above) in Rasulgarh Sabar Sahi slum in Bhubaneswar, as also a community space (right). The Mission's task is to transform slums into proper habitats with essential civic infrastructure in place, including roads, piped water supply, sewage systems, community toilets, gardens and other open spaces. The programme is being implemented across all 114 urban areas in the state’s 30 districts, making it the world’s largest such initiative.
Multi-activity centres — which serve as classrooms or as venues for social gatherings and livelihood activities — are a feature of the programme, which has won the India Geospatial Excellence Award and a bronze at the World Habitat Awards.
Heart-wrenching images of people gasping for oxygen on deathbeds have been ingrained in our minds even if we want to delete the Coronavirus tragedy from our memory. What has not registered as starkly is the fatal role played by air pollution in exacerbating the toll taken by the pandemic.

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, is primarily a respiratory infection and it damages the lungs in severe cases. Epidemiological studies suggest that exposure to air pollution makes people more vulnerable to severe and more lethal forms of the virus. That’s the here and now, but the increasingly toxic air the world breathes is to blame for much worse.

According to the State of Global Air 2020 report, air pollution was the fourth leading risk factor globally for early deaths in 2019, surpassed only by high blood pressure, tobacco use and poor nutrition. A total of 6.67 million deaths in the year were attributable to air pollution, the report added. India, in particular, has been hit badly by the toxic attack.

It’s no surprise, then, that Switzerland-based IQAir has nine Indian cities on its list of the world’s top ten most polluted cities (and 13 in the top 15). There’s more damning evidence: India recorded some 1.7 million premature deaths from air pollution in 2019, according to a report by the Clean Air Fund, and a study published in Lancet in 2018 stated that the country carries 32% of the global burden of severe respiratory diseases. The economic cost of air pollution in India is estimated to be $150 billion, or 5.4% of the GDP.

Researchers at the University of India
Chicago have concluded that air pollution shortens the average Indian’s life expectancy by 6.3 years, relative to what it would be if World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines were met, and 3.4 years relative to what it would be if air pollution were reduced to our own national standard. These numbers would have been grimmer had the researchers gone by WHO’s revised guidelines on air quality (released in September 2021).

Where’s the attention?
Despite such deadly statistics, air pollution hardly gets the attention it deserves and not even in Delhi, the country’s capital, which inhales some of the worst air in the world. The usual suspects are to blame: vehicle exhaust fumes, fossil fuel-based energy generation, polluting industries, construction activity, diesel gensets and the burning of waste, crop residue, or stubble, during the harvest season. Little wonder that Delhi’s denizens got accustomed to wearing face masks much before Covid struck.

Solutions have been suggested and discussed but to no avail. The problem of air pollution in India is entangled in myriad policy measures that often make things complicated and have little effect on the ground. Since existing state agencies had failed to deliver results, the central government formed the Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Adjoining Areas, in the hope that it would come up with resolutions in collaboration with the state governments of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Delhi and its adjoining regions were the focus, and with good reason. The NCR has witnessed numerous policy and other interventions, among them the National Clean Air Programme, the odd-even formula for taking out cars, anti-smog water guns, switching off diesel gensets in residential colonies, newer standards for petrol and diesel cars, and encouraging the use of electric vehicles (EVs).

The thrust in all of this is improving ambient air quality. EVs offer a bit of

9 of the world’s 10 most polluted cities are in India

1. Hotan (China) 110.2
2. Ghaziabad (India) 106.6
3. Bulandshahr (India) 98.4
4. Bisrakh Jalalpur (India) 96
5. Bhiwadi (India) 95.5
6. Noida (India) 94.4
7. Greater Noida (India) 89.5
8. Kanpur (India) 89.1
9. Lucknow (India) 86.2
10. Delhi (India) 84

These cities have been listed according to their annual average PM2.5 concentration (in ug/m3, or micrograms per cubic meter), which refers to atmospheric particulate matter (PM).
Source: IQAir (2020)
respite here. Delhi has more than 12 million registered vehicles and the transport sector is the main source of toxic emissions. EVs come with a lot of promise but it will take some time for adequate infrastructure to be set up and for market adoption to reach a promising point.

**Philippines solution**
It is important to look for innovative ways of curbing air pollution. An effective solution has been tried out in the Philippines, where a small vehicular device called a carbon cutter has been piloted. This not only cuts emission by more than 65% but also delivers fuel savings of 15%-20%.

Project HARIT (harnessing the power of agricultural residues through innovative technologies), funded by the Tata Trusts and implemented by the Nature Conservancy (India), is another example of an innovative solution. Here the problem addressed is stubble burning in Punjab and it is done using the ‘Happy Seeder’ technology and by promoting no-burn practices.

Solutions such as these can go a long way in tackling the catastrophic risks posed by air pollution. How well a country can fare on this front will determine the progress it makes in achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In absolute terms, India is the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases (after China and the United States) in the world. It is important to reiterate that if India fails to meet its SDG targets, the world would fail as well. This requires collaboration and joint action involving governments, the corporate sector, philanthropies, nonprofits and people in general. All of us have a responsibility to put our shoulder to this wheel and to expend every breath we take to make a difference.
Talent gets wings

Odisha has taken huge strides in creating a skill development ecosystem that trains and nurtures youth in a way that is at once innovative and effective

Odisha’s skilling story began when, at the behest of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the Odisha Skill Development Authority (OSDA) was created in 2016. The one-line charter for the newly-constituted authority was to build an aspirational brand called Skilled-in-Odisha. The intended brand promise was to make future employers ask their would-be employees, “Are you skilled or are you Skilled-in-Odisha?”

The overarching goal had three parts to it. In the short term, high-quality employers would make a beeline to lock in talent from the state’s skills training institutions. In the midterm, that would shift to attracting global employers to hire local talent. In the long term, the intent was to make Odisha an active lab, a sandbox for innovation. The task ahead was clear: we needed to think and go beyond skill development. We needed to look at skills to deliver human transformation.

A three-fold strategy was cemented. First, fix the industrial training institute (ITI) system. Second, significantly improve the quality and scale of short-duration training programmes operating under the central as well as the state government. Third, accelerate the setting up of eight state-of-the-art ‘advanced skill training institutions’ (ASTIs) with a loan of nearly $200 million from the Asian Development Bank.

We were hugely successful with our first two objectives but ran into roadblocks with the ASTIs. This had to be course corrected midway, and the idea morphed into something more substantial and potentially more impactful. But first, the ITIs needed fixing.

The ITIs as institutions have receded in stature in India over the decades, and they have become synonymous with failed aspirations and blocked dreams. If a high school student had all doors slammed shut, he (or she) came to an ITI. Our job was to start here and find the role models to prop them up.

Winning formula

We used a 10-6-4-2 formula where every ITI had to prominently hold up the alumni they were truly proud of, so that young people looked up to them and felt inspired to consider joining the skill bandwagon. The formula was simple: each ITI had to name 10 students it was delighted with. Teachers needed to know the socioeconomic story of these students: where they came from, how their transformation at the institute happened, how they overcame odds and where they were placed.

Of these 10, six had to be those who had made a mark outside Odisha. Importantly, four of the 10 had to be women (historically, ITIs have not been a place for women; we needed to break that mould). Finally, two of the 10 had to be small entrepreneurs, people who had got a business off the ground.

The formula caught everyone’s fancy because everybody loves a great story. Today, every ITI in Odisha can showcase role models who inspire others to follow their examples. The first was Muni Tigga,
an Adivasi girl who lost her father very early in her life. She came to an ITI to train for two years and then became a loco-engine pilot with the Indian Railways, where she hauls trains between Bhubaneswar and Palasa.

**Making an entrepreneur**

Nunaram Hansda, another tribal, came to ITI Rourkela, where he always ran short of his mess dues of ₹30 a month. His teachers pooled money to cover the deficit and let him study. Hansda now runs the insulin manufacturing line at Biocon. Similarly, Soumnedra Das finished at ITI Puri and became a trainee at Tata Motors before quitting his job to start a garage where he employs 80 people and clocks annual revenues of ₹80 million.

Making the ITI students self-confident was critical. The state roped in the National Institute of Fashion Design to craft a new set of uniforms for them and paid ₹140 million for this. Sportswear was introduced as weekend attire. Students were encouraged to be sporty, to compete at state-level ITI fests where debating, acting and other artistic talents are celebrated. These students now look forward to going to class because there are other cool things to do there as well.

Among the many interventions, one was the concept of a change agent to work with young students towards enhancing their life skills. This was done by drawing inspiration from the ‘Teach for India’ initiative, whereby good trainers could be deployed on two-year fellowships to augment technical training with life skills.

A pilot project was implemented with philanthropic funding and, once the idea was proven viable, the state took over the large-scale adoption of the programme in partnership with Tata Strive, a skill development initiative operating under the aegis of the Tata Trusts. Today, 90 change leaders are part of a process that impacts 27,000 students every year. These students learn about leadership, teamwork, problem solving, sustainability and design thinking.

In 2016, Odisha’s ITIs had less than 6% of female enrolment. Fast forward to now and many ITIs have crossed 20% in female student strength. But there’s much more to these ITIs: they have skill museums, art installations that showcase their technical and design prowess, and they take pride in their social outreach in times of natural disasters.

The programme led to teachers themselves getting a sense of direction and ambition. For the first time in India, we sent 215 ITI teachers and administrators to ITE Singapore, one of the best skilling institutions in the world. These teachers, 90% of whom did not have a passport before the Singapore trip, crafted the mission, vision and values for what became the ‘new ITI’.

Beyond the ITI and polytechnics, the state imparts short-term, employment-linked skills training for those who have dropped out of school. These youth train to become retail sales assistants, drivers, janitors, healthcare assistants, electricians etc. The flagship programme for such training is the DDU-GKY scheme of the Indian government, and Odisha has been adjudged the best performing state for the scheme’s implementation for three years in a row.

Apart from DDU-GKY, there are other programmes seeded by the central and state governments that are pushing the agenda for employment-linked, short-term skilling. Among the thousands of beneficiaries is Sumati Nayak from Bhadrak, a Class X pass who couldn’t speak any language other than Odia. Sumati is now a department manager at Westside’s Coimbatore outlet.
While Odisha has done exceedingly well in terms of fixing its ITIs and scaling up programmes such as DDU-GKY, the plan to set up eight ASTIs ran into problems. These were to be supported by the government with land, buildings and machinery but were to be operated by the private sector. When the bidding process took place, there was little interest from the private sector. Sensing that outsourcing was probably the wrong strategy, the state government decided to ‘in-source’ the effort, but with a big difference. Instead of ASTIs, a ‘world skill centre’ was established in Bhubaneswar at an outlay of nearly $185 million and with expert help from Singapore. Housed in an 18-storey, state-of-the-art building spanning 500,000 sq ft, this centre will roll out one-year courses in manufacturing and offer other courses too. Additionally, through several other programmes, it will directly and indirectly impact 150,000 youth by 2024.

The Odisha skills story wouldn’t be complete without talking about the way the state has broken through the clouds to arrive at the global stage in skill competitions. For that, we need to talk about the World Skills Competition, which is the Olympics of the skilling world. The

**Outside to inside**

The ‘Skilled-in-Odisha’ initiative is about enabling youth to learn and grow, to get a job or start a business.
last one was held in Kazan, Russia, in 2019 and in preparation for that, Odisha set up ‘Mission 123’. It meant Odisha would strive to get India one gold, two silvers and three bronze medals in Kazan.

The skills 2018 competition conducted in Bhubaneswar was the precursor for the Russia contest and it had some 5,000 youth competing. Odisha had the largest contingent among the eight states in the fray and it came out on top. At the national level, the state surprised all with the second-largest medals tally in the country. More importantly, three participants from Odisha represented India at Kazan and one of them, Aswatha Narayan, won India its very first gold medal.

Based on the original charter to make Odisha a sandbox for innovation, many breakthrough ideas have been created. One such is the Nano Unicorn programme, wherein small enterprises set up by skilled youth can generate jobs at the village or small-town level. At the core of the Nano Unicorn effort, are skill-trained youth. We scout them for their entrepreneurial aptitude. We listen to their dreams and, if we like their story, we send them to a two-week mini-MBA programme where they can hone their business ideas.

With the help of Tata Strive, a pilot has been rolled out with 433 Nano Unicorns and this will be scaled up to 3,000. The larger goal is to harvest the story of entrepreneurship and package it into school-level curriculums so that more young people look at skills as a means to setting up their own businesses.