

# cause marketing

Goonj... a voice, an effort

by Tuhina Anand



Goonj has been doing commendable work in providing the basic need of clothing to many deprived in the villages of India. It's a simple idea of using the excesses of the city and channelizing it in the direction where these can be used. A tour to the Goonj facility in New Delhi is an eye opener as one witnesses the methodical approach adopted to the entire process of clothes contribution and the meticulous sorting and coding to ensure segregation of

clothes by gender and age, social, cultural norms, climate details and type of garments.

Goonj is a nationwide movement started 14 years ago by Ashoka and Schwab Fellow Anshu Gupta and his friends to address the most basic but ignored need of clothing and the multifaceted role it plays in villages of India. By using vast quantities of untapped underutilized material lying in urban homes as a powerful resource, Goonj is trying to address both these critical issues simultaneously without burdening either the giver or the receiver in the process.

Goonj partners with corporates for many of its initiatives. However, Anshu emphatically points that unlike many organizations Goonj shares a very different relationship with its partners. He said, "There is no donor-beneficiary relationship. When someone extends a desire to partner with us, we try and encourage them to first understand what's the kind of work Goonj does. I believe that there is a need of paradigm shift in the way companies view CSR activities."

He continued, "There has to be synergies between what we believe and the outlook of companies we partner with. To understand our ethos and see if there is match, there is a need to first experience and understand our work. If then they feel there is a match in wavelength and cause we are happy to partner. Let me clarify that this is not any kind of arrogance but a sincere feeling that any partnership even if its with a development sector would only work if we are treated as equals and not a facilitator in their CSR activities."

In the past Goonj has initiated clothes contribution drive for the Joy of Giving week. It had also partnered with Whirlpool for a campaign titled 'Ek Jodi Kapda' which Anshu thinks is an example of a great partnership where the management came down to Delhi to see and understand the way Goonj functions thus helping in understanding each other resulting in the campaign being





extremely successful. Mutual understanding and respect is the key to success.

Another successful campaign that definitely scores a mention is Goonj's partnership with Johnson's Baby for 'Share the Language of Love'. This was an initiative encouraging people to part with their child's clothes, toys, books and other belongings which could bring joys in the lives of less privileged kids.

Anshu also points that for CSR activities the companies need to shift focus and bring to fore uncommon causes like education or mental health. He said, "There is a need to move away from 'ek rupiya' contribution mentality which many think is CSR and really revamp at the way this area is seen by majority."

Goonj has been lauded for its initiative Cloth for Work in the rural areas which has helped in completion of many development activities in the villages. The organization encourages communities to take lead in activities like communities build bamboo bridges, digging up wells, repair roads, clean up villages and they get clothes in lieu of this work. This initiative has benefitted many in the remote villages of Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh among others.

There is another initiative called School to School (S2S) that supports resource starved rural and slum schools by sensitizing urban students and their parents about the needs of their less fortunate counterparts; material like old books, uniforms, shoes, school bags, etc. are channelized to thousands of village children, motivating them towards learning.

Goonj has been working relentlessly for spreading awareness among women to maintain hygiene during menstruation and distributes cloth sanitary napkins made at Goonj workshop to women across villages and slums.

Currently, Goonj has its own offices and voluntary set ups in eight cities and is dealing with roughly 1000 tones of material every month, working across parts of more than 21 states of India. It has many awards and accolades for the commendable work that it has been undertaking like in November of 2012, Anshu Gupta was awarded the 'Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award' by Schwab Foundation. The organization has been chosen as 'Game Changing Innovation' by NASA and US State Department and GDN Japanese Award for 'Most Innovative Development Project' among many other such prestigious recognition for its work. ■

