FAST-TRACKING MOTHER TONGUE LITERACY:
DEVI SANSTHAN’S BOLD RESPONSE TO THE AGE OF AI & CLIMATE CHANGE
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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of 10XGood, a unique initiative from DEVI Sansthan (Dignity, Education, Vision International) in media partnership with The Good Sight.

Our primary focus is on literacy for climate change, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - two interconnected elements vital to the sustainability and prosperity of our shared global community.

Our aim with 10XGood is simple: we want to share stories, ideas, and strategies that fuel the collective quest for a better world. We are proud to launch this magazine to facilitate engagements that catalyze tenfold growth in goodness across the world.

As an organization, DEVI Sansthan has been deeply committed to promoting dignity and education and fostering a global vision. This magazine is an extension of these commitments. We believe in the transformative power of literacy, which goes far beyond basic reading and writing skills. Literacy is the bridge that connects individuals with opportunities, societies with prosperity, and economies with sustainable growth.

The importance of literacy cannot be overstated in our path towards the SDGs. Each of the 17 goals, from eradicating poverty to ensuring gender equality, from creating sustainable cities to fostering innovation, is intrinsically linked with education and literacy.

In each edition of 10XGood, we will spotlight projects, initiatives, and people working tirelessly towards improving literacy rates and advancing SDGs. We will provide a platform for sharing insights, challenging ideas, and sparking conversations that matter. We will strive to inspire, inform, and involve you in this exciting journey towards a world that is not just twice, but ten times better.

The potential for change is vast, and the rewards are significant. Every step taken, every individual empowered, and every goal reached is a step towards that tenfold growth in goodness.

Together, we can be catalysts for change. Together, we can drive forward progress on literacy and SDGs. And together, we can achieve 10XGood.

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Fast-Tracking Mother-tongue Literacy in the Age of AI & Climate Change

- By Dr. Sunita Gandhi

In the age of AI and climate change, the need for fast-tracking foundational literacy becomes even more crucial. Climate change poses unprecedented challenges that require informed and engaged individuals to drive sustainable solutions. Foundational literacy equips people with the knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to understand the consequences of climate change, protect their families and communities from the consequences of climate change, and actively participate in climate action initiatives.

Accelerating foundational literacy in the age of AI and climate change is vital for empowering individuals and communities to address urgent challenges.

There are no words
Children who cannot understand a simple text by age ten, selected countries, % (Data from UNICEF) 2019

- Congo 80%
- Philippines 82%
- Ethiopia 80%
- South Africa 78%
- Egypt 80%
- Senegal 80%
- India 80%
- Indonesia 80%
- Brazil 80%
- Algeria 80%
- China 80%
- Vietnam 80%
- United States 80%
- Swaziland World Bank

The literacy gap is stark and real.

Failure to bridge the gap between the illiterate and the literate will widen the divide even further, creating a stark contrast between those who can leverage AI and those left behind. Moreover, the historical significance of literacy is underscored by its impressive return on investment (ROI), estimated at seven times the initial investment. The costs of slow progress of literacy are colossal, and unimaginable.

The urgency for global literacy has never been greater, reminiscent of the time when people had to adapt to the newly industrializing world during the Industrial Revolution. To address this challenge, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must prioritize foundational literacy to unlock its transformative potential.

By equipping individuals with the ability to read, write, and comprehend, foundational literacy lays the groundwork for their active engagement in addressing the global challenges outlined in the SDGs.

One system that exemplifies the efficacy of evidence-based approaches is ALfA (Accelerating Learning for All). The pedagogy encourages learners to discover facts independently, using their visual understanding of the environment and cognitive connections to scaffold learning from simple to complex. ALfA emphasizes learning in pairs and organizes learning experiences from known to unknown, collaborate, exchange knowledge, and co-create their learning. By doing so, it fast-tracks learning. It further fosters inclusive societies, empowers individuals, and helps build a future focused on the collective good.
A revolutionary new approach is engaging children and giving them the agency to learn by working with each other in pairs. Learning is exploding along with climate consciousness, citizenship, character and connectedness (social-emotional-mental well-being).

The disruptive pedagogy of ALfA revolutionizes the process of learning by employing innovative techniques and materials. The study materials used in ALfA consist of simple prompts with visuals that encourage action between two children working as a pair. Instead of relying on extensive textbooks and workbooks, ALfA utilizes thin booklets comprising only 15 to 20 pages per child, significantly reducing the volume of materials. This streamlined approach enables children to learn both reading and writing skills, starting from zero knowledge of letters and progressing to Grade 3 proficiency in just 30-45 days. Similarly, a few additional pages per child are sufficient to achieve Grade 3 proficiency in numeracy.

The ALfA revolution has been documented in Chapters 8 and 10 by Harvard Graduate School of Education in a recent book: Rebuilding Resilient Education Systems After the COVID-19 Pandemic.

https://www.amazon.com/Rebuilding-Resilient-Education-COVID-19/dp/B0BXH9T5TS

Mother Tongue Literacy: 30-45 days is all it takes using ALfA Way App beginning to be adopted worldwide in different nations.
Roleplays and stories not only reinforce reading with fluency and understanding, they also build climate consciousness and climate action.

Roleplays are designed to develop citizenship, social-emotional-mental well being and character.

Low-to-no cost Mother Tongue Fast-Track Literacy is presently available in 30 languages (15 Indian and 15 international).

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ALfA’s reach is extensive, as it is available in 30 languages, with more being added continuously. Alongside its primary focus on literacy, ALfA integrates climate consciousness into its learning design. Once learners acquire the skill to read, which typically takes just four weeks with ALfA, they engage with storybooks on climate change and participate in role-plays centered around citizenship, connectedness (social-emotional-mental well-being), and character development. This holistic approach ensures that learners become well-rounded individuals who are equipped to tackle the challenges of the current era in a more effective and informed manner. ALfA’s pedagogy not only facilitates skill acquisition but also nurtures a sense of responsibility and empowerment in learners, preparing them to make climate-conscious choices and contribute positively to their communities.

Training of teachers and trainers through Massive Open Online Training has been a breakthrough leveraging the power of technology to reach far corners of the world. The first MOOT in March 2023 attracted participation from 22 countries and 26 states and union territories of India.
ALfA literacy education extends beyond reading and writing skills. It encompasses climate action, citizenship, character development, and connectedness (social-emotional-mental well-being). By integrating these elements into literacy programs, we can empower learners to actively engage with global challenges, develop a sense of responsibility towards their communities, foster positive values and ethical behavior, and cultivate meaningful connections with others. By emphasizing learning in pairs, ALfA cultivates a sense of agency and ownership of one’s learning creating a collaborative learning environment that promotes knowledge sharing, community engagement, and collective problem-solving.

ALfA (Accelerating Learning for All) is a groundbreaking educational system that not only addresses foundational literacy but also integrates climate change education seamlessly. ALfA recognizes the interconnectedness between literacy, climate change, and sustainable development. By going beyond foundational skills and addressing multiple competencies, we can narrow the gap between the illiterate and the literate in this age of AI.

As the world becomes increasingly reliant on AI, the speed at which we achieve global literacy has become of utmost importance. Fast-tracking foundational literacy in the age of AI and climate change is a crucial step towards empowering individuals and communities to address the pressing challenges of our time. Through innovative approaches like ALfA, which seamlessly integrates climate change education into the curriculum, learners not only acquire essential literacy skills but also develop environmental stewardship. By equipping future generations with this knowledge and empowering them to take action, we can build a more resilient, climate-conscious, and sustainable future for all.

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In conclusion, the speed at which we achieve global literacy has become of utmost importance in this age of AI. A paradigm shift in education is necessary, one that ensures equitable access to quality education for all. Only then can we bridge the gap, empower learners, and create a more inclusive society that is not left behind.

Dr. Sunita Gandhi, CEO of DEVI Sansthan (Dignity Education Vision International), is a distinguished professional with a background as a former economist at the World Bank and a PhD in Physics from Cambridge University. She also serves as the Director of Academics at City Montessori School (CMS), the world’s largest school.
Empowering educators to Succeed in Digital Age

Bharti Foundation’s unique platform ‘TheTeacherApp’ empowers educators to learn and grow together, making a significant stride in the evolving education landscape.

In the ongoing transformation of the education landscape, technology has become an essential tool for educators, children, and parents. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online education, creating the need for preparing teachers for innovative teaching methods integrated with technology. Bharti Foundation’s app for teachers, ‘TheTeacherApp’ is a unique platform designed to empower the educators by providing them with high quality classroom resources, learning bytes and modules as well as a supportive online community to share ideas, and best practices with each other. TheTeacherApp also includes special features and tools for teachers to develop their skills, gain recognition for their contributions and achievements, and uplift their schools’ quality.

COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed the education landscape, driving educators worldwide to join the current technological transformation in the sector and adapt online teaching tools to re-ignite the thrill of learning in classrooms. We are witnessing the power of technology and how it is being consumed by educators and even parents for supporting children in better academic orientation. Now when children have returned to schools, the challenge for teachers is to rekindle the energy in classrooms and increase participation amongst students while continuing to integrate technology in everyday teaching and learning.

Technology can undoubtedly play a pivotal role in supporting teachers by providing them access to innovative activities, best practices and quality teaching-learning materials. Government is providing ICT labs, smart classrooms, mobiles and laptops to students, tablets to teachers, which are excellent initiatives of technological interventions in everyday teaching along with development of required skills in students. In addition, DIKSHA, an initiative of NCERT (Ministry of Education, Govt. of India), being one the largest digital infrastructure for knowledge sharing, hosts a variety of content for learners and teachers from all classes in 36 Indian languages. States/UTs are leveraging this platform to build their own solutions and programs for their schools leading to 5.24 billion+ usage with 2 lakh+ content contribution on the platform.

Though government has taken the first pioneering step in this direction and state governments are immersing
themselves in creating locally contextualized training content and learning materials, the need of the hour is to curate and ensure high quality resources for the teachers as well as students. Besides, for teachers in rural India, especially with limited resources and skills, navigating through the digital landscape can be daunting and therefore user-friendly digital platforms as well as short capsule trainings for teachers are also required.

Bharti Foundation is working towards creating such a platform with high quality, field-tested resources and an online supportive community for teachers through an app called ‘TheTeacherApp’ where the educators can learn from each other, share best practices, exchange ideas and resources and collaborate. With this easy to navigate platform, teachers can personalize their learning experience with the help of self-paced courses, workshops, webinars, trainings and get recognized for their contributions and achievements.

Teaching, in itself, is a self-motivating job and at times it requires teachers to come together, share best practices and support each other to improve the overall learning experience of students. They need resources that would support them in making their classroom teaching effective while reducing the time spent on administrative aspects. This app will help teachers, school leaders and educationists with engaging scholastic and co-scholastic content for improving overall school performance. There is also a need for more experienced teachers to share their expertise with the young generation of teachers and to those who are in far flung areas with limited access to resources, while the young teachers can help the former ones with tips and tricks about technology. Teachers are the fulcrum of every change that NEP is looking at, be it about quality in education, building life skills in children or preparing them for the future. TheTeacherApp can support educators to bring in the much-required transformation in schools in this digital age.

More innovative players like civil societies, NGOs, corporate foundations should step in to bridge the gaps in teaching, support educators with a supportive community, provide accessibility to high quality teaching learning materials & lesson plans and build a system for recognizing teachers while shining light on their good work. Bharti Foundation, given its extensive work in the rural communities, is assessing the need of educators in rural areas to delve on the possible solutions to make TheTeacherApp effective for the teaching community at large. The app, being one-of-a-kind, will enable the educators in learning and growing together thereby, making a significant stride in the ever-evolving education landscape. Its success will establish the power of technology in education and foster an online community that is always keen to learn and support each other in the growth process, regardless of location or socio-economic background.
Leading the Way in Education for Sustainable Development

- By Shameem Singh

CMS has embarked on a diverse range of achievable projects to fulfill the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 agenda.

Schools stand as lighthouses of society, illuminating the path towards a brighter future. Embracing sustainability, CMS (City Montessori School) in Lucknow, India, proudly holds the title of the world’s largest school, recognized by Guinness World Records and esteemed with the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education. Above all, CMS treasures a way of life that echoes the environmentally friendly practices of our ancestors, recognizing the urgent need to combat climate change. It advocates for reduced reliance on non-eco-friendly resources and encourages individuals to make conscious choices that minimize their carbon footprint. CMS aims to create a positive impact on the environment and contribute to the global efforts in addressing the challenges of climate change.

The rapid advancements in technology and IT over the past decade have given rise to needs that were previously non-existent. As such, sustainability, which revolves around people’s ability to coexist on Earth for an extended period, demands that we pause and evaluate our needs before blindly pursuing their fulfillment. CMS, the very institution that once emphasized keeping pace with technological progress as a boon, has now taken on the mantle of cultivating a growth mindset when it comes to sustainable living. Recognizing its role as a societal beacon, CMS is committed to building capacity and developing a curriculum that aligns with the principles of education for sustainable development.

With unwavering dedication, CMS has embarked on a diverse range of achievable projects to fulfill the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 agenda. Through the active participation of its students, teachers, staff, alumni, and parents, CMS endeavors to make a significant contribution to environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources. Engaging neighboring communities, CMS aims to transform Lucknow into a green, clean, and eco-friendly city by adopting affordable, reliable, and professional approaches to natural resource management.

By instilling a sustainable living mindset in its 58,000 students, CMS is making a significant environmental impact that extends from the local community to the national and global levels.

At CMS, special morning assemblies commemorate UN International Days and National Days, reminding students of their fundamental responsibilities toward the planet and its diverse life forms. Every new session kicks off with campus-wide tree plantations and campaigns to reduce wastage on World Earth Day, celebrated globally on April 22nd. Contributing to local biodiversity, students plant a variety of flora, while their bird feeders help avian species thrive in their natural habitats (SDG 15). The students and staff collaborate with the local municipal bodies from time to time for offering community service to clean the only river flowing through the heart of the city – Gomti (SDG 6). The school integrates education for sustainable development goals into daily lesson plans, fostering global citizenship education and emphasizing partnerships for goals (SDG 17).

CMS empowers teachers with professionally designed SDG Toolkits, enabling them to
The World Health Organization has warned about preventable diseases like Dengue and Malaria, which the World Health Organization has warned about.

The K-12 extracurricular activities at CMS encompass waste segregation programs, awareness campaigns on reducing wastage and promoting reusing and recycling. In collaboration with Blue Planet Environmental Solutions, a leading global waste management company, CMS organized the “Blue Nudge” project, collecting 3.1 metric tonnes of recyclable paper and plastic waste (SDG 12). CMS also promotes no plastic zones, encouraging the reduction of plastic usage and the adoption of green and sustainable products. Additionally, sustainable technologies such as solar power, rainwater harvesting, and LED bulbs are implemented across CMS buildings (SDG 7).

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Regular energy and water audits instill a sense of responsibility and promote judicious resource usage (SDG 6). CMS observes various days related to climate, environment, water, air pollution, and wildlife preservation throughout the year, fostering a mindset of caring for the planet. The vibrant CMS community celebrates 32 international festivals across campuses, featuring dramas, debates, skits, poetry recitations, blogging, and film and PowerPoint presentations on environmental and social themes like biodiversity, poverty, racism, and gender inequality. CMS organizes prestigious international environmental events, including the International Environment Olympiad, Geofest, and the International Youth Festival. These events attract participants from around the world, fostering environmental and social awareness among students. Through spotlight events like the “Youth Climate Conclave” in partnership with UNICEF, the National Museum of Natural History, and the TERI Eco club, CMS provides a platform for students to voice their individual initiatives and influence their communities in contributing to climate change mitigation. Right from their Kindergarten years, students are trained on ways to combat global warming at local level (SDG 13).

Seamlessly incorporate SDGs into various subjects like Science, English, and Mathematics. Through co-curricular activities, such as community partnership drives, CMS sensitizes citizens to global issues and encourages adherence to government guidelines to prevent negative consequences. These drives encompass rallies on groundwater and soil conservation, anti-war campaigns, global warming campaigns, cleanliness campaigns and health initiatives targeting preventable diseases like Dengue and Malaria, which the World Health Organization has warned as potential epidemics (SDG 3).

Through a variety of community service projects like Donations to charitable trusts such as Helpage India (for senior citizens), Muskaan (old age home) and a multitude of other initiatives, CMS instills in its students the virtues of caring, compassion, respect and dignity (SDG 1 and SDG 2).

CMS students have received accolades for their exceptional environmental projects, consistently winning the WIPRO Earthian Award. The school has also been recognized by the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) and other esteemed organizations. The WIPRO Earthian program, India’s largest sustainability education initiative, received over 1,200 project entries in 2022, with CMS securing 20 winning and 20 shortlisted entries chosen by an independent jury. These projects focus on themes like biodiversity, waste management, and water management, primarily conducted within the school premises. Promoting gender equality is a core value at CMS. The school ensures equal opportunities for both boys and girls in the student council, house activities, and all co-curricular programs. Gender equality clubs, Model United Nations clubs, and student societies provide platforms where students can freely express their opinions (SDG 5).

Starting from Grade 5, CMS students actively engage in the “Each One Teach One Global Dream Literacy” program initiated by DEVI (Dignity Education Vision International). In this program, each child teaches at least one underprivileged learner how to read and write within a designated timeline (SDG 4). Over the years, more than 5,000 learners have participated in the Generation Global International Dialogue program. This program fosters peaceful coexistence by teaching students inclusivity, respect for diverse cultures and opinions, and effective communication (SDG 16).

CMS students receive comprehensive training and participate in the International Conference of Chief Justices of the World, an annual event organized by the school for the past 23 years. During the conference, CMS students present a petition to the world judiciary on behalf of children worldwide, advocating for the protection of their rights and a secure future (SDG 16).

The time has come for a global movement, a ‘Jan Andolan,’ as emphasized by our honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at COP26. This movement aims to propel Lifestyle for Environment as a campaign, fostering a mass movement toward an environmentally conscious lifestyle.
Notable CMS Projects
- Blue Nudge Project (SDG 12)
- Solar Panel Installations (SDG 7)
- River Cleanup Drives on Sundays (SDG 6)
- Each One Teach One - Global Dream (SDG 4)
- Collection Drives for Clothes, Money, and Food Donations (SDG 1, SDG 2)
- Year-round Plantation Drives (SDG 15)
- Gender Equality Clubs (SDG 5)
- Training Support Staff for Self-dependence (SDG 8)
- Health Camps and Free Vaccination Drives for the Underprivileged (SDG 3)

The CMS community is continuously engaged in various other projects and initiatives aligned with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals to foster a sustainable future for all.

Shameem Singh, an educator and Vice Principal at City Montessori School Mahanagar, is widely acknowledged for her significant contributions to Education for Sustainable Development. She spearheaded the integration of SDGs and Global Citizenship into CMS’s mainstream education, playing a key role in the Principal’s cohort that developed innovative tools aligned with the National Education Policy 2020, driving educational reform. With over 20 years of experience in Experiential Education, she passionately nurtures students and paves the way for conscientious global citizens.
Where Students Learn to be Stewards of the Planet

- By Dr. Patricia Gonde

Lusitania Primary School believes that every student has a responsibility to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. As a society, we all have a role to play in achieving these goals, and Lusitania Primary School is doing its part.

Lusitania Primary School is located in Greendale suburb, in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. It is the only primary school in Zimbabwe that teaches Portuguese as a foreign language.

At Lusitania Primary School, we believe that every student has a responsibility to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. We recognize that our actions have an impact on the planet, and that we must work together to make a positive change.

The SDG club at Lusitania is an important initiative that promotes sustainable development practices and raises awareness about issues related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Through the club, students learn about the Sustainable Development Goals and how they can contribute to achieving them, both in their personal lives and in their communities. By participating in fun and engaging activities, students are more invested in the goals and their importance for a better future.

One of the initiatives we have undertaken to promote sustainable development is a clean-up campaign. Every year, 500 students from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Grade 7 participate in a clean-up campaign outside the school and the nearby shopping center. This campaign serves multiple purposes:

- It raises awareness about the importance of waste management and recycling.
- It helps to reduce litter and pollution in the environment.
- It promotes a sense of community and civic responsibility among students.

Another initiative we have undertaken to support the SDGs is tree planting. Every year, our students plant trees before they leave the school for high school. This initiative promotes environmental sustainability and contributes to the achievement of SDG 15, which is to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. At Lusitania, the tree planting activities are carried out by the children themselves, making it a great learning opportunity for them. By actively participating in the planting process, children learn about the importance of environmental conservation and gain a better understanding of the role that trees play in mitigating climate change and protecting biodiversity. This hands-on experience helps them develop a sense of responsibility towards the environment and inspire them to take action towards achieving the SDGs. Moreover, by planting trees in the school yard and outside, our children contribute to creating a more sustainable and greener environment.
environment, which can have a positive impact on their physical and mental well-being. The tree planting activities at Lusitania provide an excellent opportunity for children to connect with nature, learn about sustainability, and contribute to achieving the SDGs.

We also teach our students to practice the 3Rs of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. We have recently added the fourth R, which is Repair. By practicing these principles, we promote responsible consumption and production, which is SDG 12. In addition to these initiatives, we also integrate the SDGs into our curriculum. We teach our students about the importance of sustainable development and how they can contribute to achieving the SDGs. This helps to raise awareness among our students and prepares them to become responsible global citizens.

We have shown great dedication towards sustainability by entering the SUCHANA UN SDG project. Last year, our school entered the SUCHANA UN SDG Project organized by Dr. Kalyani Rao of India. Our school entered two groups in the categories of Climate Action and Life Below Water. Our two groups emerged winners in both categories where they entered. They won two awards on climate change and life below water.

Our students decided to make a positive impact on their community by recycling plastic and creating useful items such as pencil cases and flower pots for a children’s home. This not only helped reduce plastic waste but also provided practical items for those in need. The students also made weather instruments, demonstrating their creativity and scientific skills. Lusitania Primary School’s commitment to sustainability and innovation serves as an inspiration for others to follow. These awards are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our students, teachers, and the community. They also serve as an inspiration for us to continue our efforts to promote sustainable development.

This year, we have two children from ECD and two children from the upper grades who entered the virtual UN SDG conference “Save Our Green Turtle”. They showcased their brilliant ideas on saving green turtles despite the fact that we are from a landlocked country. Their dedication to environmental conservation and their willingness to take action to protect our planet is truly inspiring.

In conclusion, Lusitania Primary School is committed to promoting sustainable development and supporting the SDGs. We believe that every individual has a role to play in achieving these goals.

Dr. Patricia Gonde is a global educator and motivational speaker.
The journey towards universal literacy is not an easy one, but with innovative methods like ALfA and the collective efforts of passionate individuals and organizations, we can turn the tide and empower countless lives through the transformative power of literacy.

In the summer of 2021, Milita Halder, a member of Dr. Sunita Gandhi’s Global Dream team, contacted me, and I had the opportunity to connect with individuals from across the globe who share the same passion as me - transforming lives through literacy. This single action has already indirectly impacted the lives of a group of adults in Chicago, and we hope it can inspire positive change for hundreds of thousands more.

As the Director of Program Development at Literacy Chicago, the city’s oldest non-profit organization specializing in adult education, I was approached by Milita, who was searching for people to discuss literacy-related issues on their new YouTube channel called “D-Talks.” This initiative is part of Global Dream, a Disruptive Movement for Universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, spearheaded by Dr. Sunita Gandhi.

During that time, I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Sunita Gandhi and immediately became intrigued by her program aimed at eradicating illiteracy worldwide. She proposed a revolutionary method to teach reading to both children and adults.

Traditionally, there have been two widely debated approaches to teaching reading. The first is the “Whole Language” method, where words are simply memorized as whole units. The second approach involves teaching “Phonics”, which focuses on the relationship between letters or groups of letters and the sounds they represent.

One of the challenges, as explained by Dr. Gandhi, is that these methods often start from the unknown and progress towards the known. The sight word method involves memorizing the visual appearance of a word without understanding its meaning, while the phonics method uses unfamiliar symbols (letters) to connect to sounds but initially which are also unknown as in “b” says /b/.

Dr. Gandhi recognized the need to create an alternative approach to reading instruction that starts with what learners already know, connecting it to sounds, and then introducing the corresponding symbols (letters).

In the ALfA method for literacy (Accelerating Learning for All), learners begin by looking at a picture of a common object and are asked to identify the FIRST sound of the word. They are then shown the letter that represents that sound. No emphasis is placed on the name of the letter or its place in the alphabet. The goal is to connect a known picture to first sounds of these pictures, and add the known sounds to make words from the beginning. The letter is shown as a sound symbol. The ALfA method consists of two concise books, enabling learners to grasp the method within just 45 days. The first book teaches the sounds of consonants and vowels, while the second book introduces digraphs and delves into more complex reading, including short stories and poetry. Astonishingly, Dr. Gandhi explained that learners can read a newspaper within two months of utilizing this method. This revelation astonished me, given that I have witnessed the struggles faced by our adult learners, whose progress is often slow.

Low levels of literacy are often accompanied by low levels of numeracy. ALfA also incorporates a kinesthetic approach to teach numeracy, using popsicle sticks, matchsticks, or beans to facilitate counting. Within the same 45-day period, learners can master foundational math skills, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. This approach offers an engaging learning experience, focusing on active participation rather than mere memorization.

Several aspects of ALfA immediately appealed to me. First and foremost, it is an affordable program that can be accessed online, making it economically feasible. Moreover, it prioritizes environmental sustainability. Additionally, ALfA employs pair work,
enabling learners to work together and provide positive feedback, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Most importantly, ALfA is designed to be enjoyable for both teachers and learners. It adopts a student-centric approach where learners have agency in their own learning process. Teachers serve as facilitators, demonstrating the method and then allowing learners to engage in activities independently.

Motivated by the literacy crisis in the United States, where 130 million adults struggle to read basic sentences, making everyday life challenging or even impossible, I was determined to explore ALfA further. According to the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, 1 in 4 children in the U.S. grows up without acquiring the essential skill of reading, and research suggests that 2 out of 3 children who struggle with reading by 4th grade end up facing long-term difficulties, potentially leading to welfare issues or incarceration.

When invited to join the Global Advisory Committee for Dr. Gandhi’s organization, DEVI Sansthan, I eagerly accepted and traveled to Lucknow, India, in March 2023 to participate in the first Global Summit. The summit included free training in the ALfA method and listened to their inspiring stories.

Filled with conviction that ALfA is an effective approach, we decided to initiate a pilot program at Literacy Chicago with a group of adult learners who have struggled with reading. Since 1968, Literacy Chicago has been dedicated to teaching adults how to read. While I couldn’t find more recent statistics for Chicago, data from 2014 indicates that 882,000 adults in the city possess low basic literacy skills. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated this issue.

In April 2023, we carefully selected a group of learners willing to participate in the ALfA pilot program for three months. They committed to attending classes regularly, three times a week, with each session lasting two hours. The first hour focused on literacy instruction, while the second hour addressed numeracy skills.

Both the pilot group and a control group, attending our regular reading classes, underwent pre-testing using the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT) and the ALfA Numeracy Assessment.

During my visit, I had the incredible opportunity to visit several schools in Lucknow and witness the impact of ALfA on children who had learned to read through the program. It was a truly remarkable experience to see young children confidently reading from newspapers. I observed teachers implementing the ALfA methods and listened to their inspiring stories.

As of the time of writing, we are six weeks into the pilot program, and I would like to share some preliminary observations:

Initially, both learners and teachers faced challenges in “unlearning” the traditional alphabet and transitioning to focusing on the sounds. This adjustment period lasted a few days.

It took some time for learners to fully embrace the ALfA method. Changing partners and sitting in different seats presented difficulties for our learners as it took them out of their comfort zones. Initially, some found it childish.

Learners were unaccustomed to working in pairs or providing feedback to each other, so there was a learning curve in this aspect.

One learner with dyslexia encountered more difficulties compared to the others. Absenteeism has been influenced by factors such as illness, childcare responsibilities, and other challenges that adult learners face in their daily lives.

Teachers often felt the urge to provide assistance in the traditional manner, and it has been a learning process for them as well. In the ALfA process, learners are expected to learn primarily on their own.

Nevertheless, despite these initial challenges, learners are now genuinely enjoying the ALfA method. One woman, who previously couldn’t read a single word in English, proudly shared with me, “I can read! When I’m driving, I can read street signs, and I’m no longer afraid of getting lost.” She expressed how reading has brought about a life-changing transformation for her.

Another student, who has attention difficulties and disabilities, can now confidently read a list of words without hesitation. It fills my heart with joy to walk into the classroom and hear the buzz of voices as our learners read aloud, engage in math activities, and experience a newfound sense of confidence and accomplishment. I am confident that the post-testing will reveal significant improvements in both literacy and numeracy scores.

I would like to express my eternal gratitude to Milita Halder, whose initial outreach connected me to this transformative opportunity. We are all aware that by empowering more individuals with the gift of literacy, we can make a profound difference in their lives and positively impact those around them.

Building on our success, Literacy Chicago is forging a partnership with DEVI Sansthan to facilitate the nationwide implementation of ALfA in the United States, pending the expected positive outcomes of our pilot program. We are committed to addressing the pressing literacy crisis in our country and ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background or circumstances, has the opportunity to acquire essential literacy skills.

The journey towards universal literacy is not an easy one, but with innovative methods like ALfA and the collective efforts of passionate individuals and organizations, we can turn the tide and empower countless lives through the transformative power of literacy. Together, let us continue to strive for a future where literacy is a fundamental right for all, opening doors of opportunity and unlocking the full potential of individuals and communities.
Integration of MIYCN & Birth Spacing to Maximise Opportunities

- By Dr. Sujeeet Ranjan

The issue of undernutrition which affects survival, development, health, productivity, and economic growth is a complex and multi-dimensional issue. The multidimensional effects of malnutrition make nutrition interventions imperative to incorporate a multi-sectoral and integrated development approach. Public health studies say that birth spacing plays an important role in nutritional status among children under 5 years of age, with shorter birth intervals increasing the risk of both stunting and being underweight. However, to date, there has been limited documentation on integrating family planning with nutrition programs in India.

According to the recent World Population report released by UNFPA, India has surpassed China in terms of population, with India currently estimated at 142.86 crore (1.4286 billion) and China at 142.57 crore (1.4257 billion). This significant shift in population dynamics marks a significant milestone. To provide context, in 1990, China’s population stood at 1144 million (1.144 billion), while India’s population was 861 million. As of last year, China remained the most populous country globally, with 1426 million people, closely followed by India with 1412 million. However, the United Nations’ 2022 projections indicate a notable shift in the future. By 2050, India’s population is projected to surge to 1668 million (1.668 billion), surpassing China’s projected decline to 1317 million (1.317 billion). This trend of India surpassing China has been anticipated for some time, though the expediting factor lies in China’s slowing population growth. Earlier this year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in China reported a decrease of 850,000 individuals in 2022 compared to the previous year.

India has an enormous problem of malnourishment, being home to almost 25% of the world’s malnourished children. A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) shows that child marriages and underage pregnancies are making a sizeable contribution to this problem, drawing a clear correlation to the undernutrition of children born to adolescent mothers. Researchers from IFPRI analysed the data relating to more than 60,000 first-time mothers across the country from the National Family Health Survey.

The recent data from National Family Health Survey (NFHS) - 5 reveals that India should more than ever focus on nutrition as it has not fared well. India has a number of programs aimed at bringing down malnutrition – the Integrated Child Development Scheme, the system of Anganwadi creches to look after and feed toddlers, and the mid-day meal scheme at schools to ensure that children get at least one full nutritious meal. These programs have been successful to a large extent. The efforts are in the right direction but the efforts will yield results only when we combine them with serious attention to bring linkages between birth spacing family planning methods and other nutrition-sensitive interventions.

Poor maternal nutrition leads to poor birth outcomes. Short pregnancy intervals are associated with an increased risk of infants being born preterm, small-for-gestational-age, and with low birth weight, all of which are associated with key indicators of childhood undernutrition, including wasting, stunting, underweight, and anaemia. Evidence shows that short birth interval is associated with adverse nutritional outcomes for the mother or the child. Birth too closely also affects the nutrition outcomes of all children in the family when the mother’s ability to adequately care for and feed her children is compromised due to too many young children to breastfeed at one time and lack of time and resources to provide adequate nutritious food and care for all children. We know that adolescent pregnancy can result in adverse nutritional outcomes for both the mother and the foetus, with an increased risk of adverse perinatal outcomes such as preterm birth, low birth weight, and small-for-gestational-age.

Integration of family planning and reproductive health services in nutrition programming, an important intervention, is often overlooked. To date, there has been limited documentation on integrating family planning with nutrition programs in India. However, to date, there has been limited documentation on integrating family planning with nutrition programs in India. According to the recent World Population report released by UNFPA, India has surpassed China in terms of population, with India currently estimated at 142.86 crore (1.4286 billion) and China at 142.57 crore (1.4257 billion). This significant shift in population dynamics marks a significant milestone. To provide context, in 1990, China’s population stood at 1144 million (1.144 billion), while India’s population was 861 million. As of last year, China remained the most populous country globally, with 1426 million people, closely followed by India with 1412 million. However, the United Nations’ 2022 projections indicate a notable shift in the future. By 2050, India’s population is projected to surge to 1668 million (1.668 billion), surpassing China’s projected decline to 1317 million (1.317 billion). This trend of India surpassing China has been anticipated for some time, though the expediting factor lies in China’s slowing population growth. Earlier this year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in China reported a decrease of 850,000 individuals in 2022 compared to the previous year.

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in India, the effect of family planning indicators on nutritional outcomes, and regional variation in India. For conducting secondary analysis, data from the recent National Family Health Survey was used.

The study revealed that FP affects nutrition in myriad direct and indirect ways. By helping women and couples have the number of children they want at the healthiest times in life, family planning can benefit mothers, infants, and children. Well-spaced births allow women’s bodies to recuperate and replenish essential nutrients and lead to better nutritional outcomes, such as healthy birth weight for their infants. The benefits of optimal birth spacing also have far-reaching effects in childhood, reducing the prevalence of one key measure of malnutrition—stunting—among children under five. Also, family planning can help women avoid high-risk pregnancies and have children at the healthiest times in life. Thus, national and local programs aiming to improve nutrition may benefit from strengthening FP services and integrating FP strategies into multisectoral development policies and implementation plans.

Studies have also shown that the first 1,000 days of a child are the most critical as infants and young children are exceptionally vulnerable to poor diet and infection during this time. There is a need for strong advocacy for empowering women through programs, which can improve maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN). Integration of family planning (FP) services (to avoid unintended pregnancy and choose whether or when to have a child) and MIYCN programs have a crucial role to play.

In 2011, the National Rural Health Mission launched the Healthy Timing and Spacing of pregnancies Initiative in three districts of Bihar using the behaviour change communication model developed by Pathfinder’s PRACHAR program. Although NGOs have had some success with spacing, they have found it much more difficult to persuade couples to delay the birth of their first child until the mother was 18 due to strong social pressure on newly married couples to demonstrate fertility by producing a child, especially a son.

Most fundamentally, spacing affects people in myriad ways and it advances human rights. The knowledge and use of family planning methods can regulate the planning of birth in terms of birth interval and nutritional status of mothers and children, birth order, and nutritional status of children. When births are well-spaced, mothers have more time, energy, and resources to adequately breastfeed and feed their young infants and children. Research studies showed that breastfeeding practices improve, leading to improved nutrition, leads to empowerment, allowing them to make better choices that ultimately benefit the health and nutrition of children and families.

Dr. Sujeet Ranjan is a public health professional and heads the Nutrition theme of Tata Trusts. Dr. Ranjan’s key focus is on social impact, establishing strategic relations and alliances with government, civil society, and social & private sectors. His core interest areas are strategy, innovation, and organization building. Dr. Ranjan has also worked as Executive Director - CFAS and Director - CARE India.
DIGIQUITY
Let’s talk access and quality

AIF’s flagship education programs design and execute innovative, tech-driven solutions, to assist school children at risk of dropping out, being left behind or ending up in child labor.

India is home to almost 19% of the world’s children, while over one-third of the country’s population is below the age of 18. With the world’s largest adolescent and youth population, India is poised to harness the demographic dividend and achieve real economic growth over the next few decades. Sadly, most of India’s children live in rural, low-income, and vulnerable communities. and their everyday lives are marked by a lack of access to basic rights, and resources, with educational poverty as one of the key impediments.

As the world works to “build back better” from COVID-19, we stand at the cusp of an inimitable opportunity to build back differently! AIF’s post-COVID-19 vision aims to radically transform the underlying economic systems of inequity and social structures of inequality that are at the root of our present suite of socio-ecological crises, further exacerbated by the pandemic. And, access to quality education is the biggest driver of this change.

UN’s SDG4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” But, despite India’s phenomenal growth story, issues of access, equity, quality, relevance, and infrastructure, continue to impede progress, especially for those living in hard-to-reach communities.

Designing participatory goals, American India Foundation (AIF) is building resilient school systems through teacher capacity development and executing an action-oriented pedagogy to address accrued learning losses. In concert with the government’s efforts to reverse the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy regression, AIF’s flagship education Programs — Digital Equalizer and the Learning and Migration Program — design and execute innovative, tech-driven solutions, to assist school children at risk of dropping out, being left behind or ending up in child labor. These high-impact interventions are committed to meeting the educational needs of children in some of the remotest geographies of India.

Access, without equity, is only half the job done. LAMP works with the government’s Seasonal Hostels Program to run Government Seasonal Hostels through its Learning and Migration Program (LAMP). Increasing access to seasonal hostels for children like Anjali, not only provides them a safe haven to learn and grow among their peers, keeps them away from child labor, but also gives them an opportunity to access education, clean water, and nutritious food, improving their health, enrollment, and retention in rural schools, equipping them with tools to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty in their family.

Mitigating such learning losses, AIF works intensively with migrant communities, and the government, to run Government Seasonal Hostels through its Learning and Migration Program (LAMP). LAMP works through multi-pronged approach, focusing on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), remedial classes, and multilingual teaching to reach tribal children at the last mile.

Its Learning Resource Center supports teachers and students with a dedicated education facilitator, and learning tools such as STEM kits, smart classes, reading corners, etc to further equity in students’ access to educational resources. In its 18 years, LAMP has impacted over 1.3 million children across 3,269 villages in 17 states and union territories in India, building future innovators.
Over the last few years, the pandemic reinforced the dire need to integrate technology into the education system and brought forth India’s deep digital divide. More importantly, the growth of digitalization, automation, AI, and other emerging technologies, now warrants a new cadre of trained workforce to step up. India, at the forefront of designing a technology-driven knowledge-based economy and with around 280 lakh youth population added every year, can deliver the workforce the world needs.

AIF’s Digital Equalizer (DE) program is addressing this emerging need, by ensuring the quality and relevance of learning transacted. It has been instrumental in changing the landscape of education in over 32,000 under-resourced government schools, by equipping them with technology-enabled classrooms that offer a wealth of new opportunities for teaching and learning by integrating technology such as interactive whiteboards, projectors, audio-visual capabilities, ICT, and STEM labs, etc, and empowering 7.2 million children through digital technology and STEM experiences. Strengthening the ecosystem, DE has also trained over 2,00,000 teachers, to integrate STEM and technology-based pedagogy in the teaching-learning methods.

Leapfrogging ahead of its peers, DE has designed the STEM Innovation and Learning Center (SILC) - the first of its kind in the country, focusing on the four core disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics and 21st-century skills to prepare educators and global citizens. The Center provides teachers and students with a comprehensive solution and hands-on tools for experiential learning and discovery-based education to improve learning outcomes, which is one of the focus areas of NEP 2020 and SDG4.

SILC, with its Innovation Corner for students, introduces them to a transdisciplinary learning approach through Robotics, AI, Space technology, and the STEM Incubation workstation. It aims to nurture their curiosity in advanced STEM courses, while also assisting them in developing their innovative ideas into prototypes and providing a platform to take part in State/ National/ International level competitions.

The Center also consists of a Technology Corner for Teachers. Fitted with a smart lab, the Tech Corner facilitates teachers to conduct techno-pedagogy-enabled classes for their students, as well as, receive training on the Digital Equalizer Way of Teaching (DEWoT). The center also contains a Studio Setup to assist teachers in creating high-quality DE Edu Reels, increasing their reach in the state.

Digital Equalizer works with children from grade 6th onwards, propelling them to the world of coding, innovations, and rocketry, and familiarizing them with Information Technology skills, with the goal of encouraging students to embrace technology from an early age.

Working with state governments, AIF is creating opportunities for young innovators, especially girls, to learn more about satellites, drones, AI, and space technology to build a futuristic workforce.

While the STEM field is one of the most rapidly growing and in-demand industries globally, one of the fundamental issues that plague this multidisciplinary ecosystem is the prevailing gender gap. For 14-year-old Pratibha, despite being in school, deep-rooted patriarchy, cultural norms, and gender biases keep her from accessing technology and confidently pursuing STEM education. This evident gender disparity reflects in India’s tech workforce with women occupying only 29% of tech roles. Rooted in achieving gender equality with lifelong learning opportunities, DE makes dedicated efforts to design STEM interventions for girls. Last year alone, DE reached over 100,000 girls giving them the agency they need, to choose a career in STEM and build pathways to become future-ready.

At AIF this is just the beginning. Its well-entrenched and flexible frameworks ensure innovative solutions and impact at scale. In the years that lie ahead, AIF aims to strengthen the education ecosystem for 10 million children and continue to foster a culture of equality, inclusion, and positive discrimination while transforming the lives of underprivileged communities at large.
You are INVITED

Join us at the Synergy Summit 2.0 on "10X Literacy: Uniting Climate Action and Sustainable Development." This event brings together passionate individuals and organizations committed to addressing the SDGs, focusing on the twin emergencies of literacy and climate change.

Literacy is a powerful catalyst for positive change, empowering individuals and communities to create a sustainable future. It plays a crucial role in eradicating poverty, improving health outcomes, promoting gender equality, and unlocking economic opportunities. Together, let’s tackle the challenge of low literacy rates and climate change, and explore innovative approaches to accelerate progress of the SDGs.

Register now for the Synergy Summit 2.0. Join us in shaping a future that is ten times brighter.

"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much."
- Helen Keller

Pictures and images are from last year’s Synergy Summit 1.0 on the theme: A Paradigm Shift in FLN, 11-12 July, India International Centre, New Delhi.
Be a CATALYST
Be at Synergy Summit 2.0

Register Now
Secure your spot and be part of a transformative journey at Synergy Summit 2.0. Together, let's engage in strategic discussions, forge alliances, and explore opportunities to drive impactful change.

International Participants
International participants may attend online. Link will be provided after registration.

THEME 1
10X Pedagogy
Discover groundbreaking pedagogical approaches that accelerate literacy. Explore success stories, innovative methods, and ideas for achieving 10X literacy. Experience a compelling case study on ALFA (Accelerating Learning for All), showcasing the potential for widespread transformation.

THEME 2
10X Policy
Understand the pivotal role of policy in supporting effective pedagogy and maximizing its impact on literacy. Learn how strategic policies can create an enabling environment for transformative literacy initiatives, driving sustainable change.

THEME 3
10X Peoples Movement
Gain valuable insights from global mass movements and witness the transformative power of collective action. Uncover the key leadership strategies and actionable steps that governments must undertake to propel time-bound, focused mass movements for swift advancements in universal literacy and 10X climate change.
Bridging the Skill Gap to Build Future Readiness

Magic Bus India Foundation aims to equip youth with the skills and knowledge they need to adapt and succeed in the evolving job market.

With 50% of India’s population under the age of 25, India is poised to have the largest workforce by 2027. While this demographic dividend presents great potential for India’s economic growth, the rate of youth unemployment in our country remains high. This is particularly among those from low-income families and marginalized communities. In fact, according to a 2020 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), nearly 18% of young people in India are neither employed nor in education or training.

The biggest obstacle facing youth from underserved communities on their road to empowerment is the lack of access to quality education and employment opportunities. As the job market is evolving at an unprecedented speed, it is difficult to predict the future needs of youth for employment. The dearth of the right skill sets, resources, and support to achieve their dreams means that the majority often find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and struggle to break free.

Skill Development is the Solution

According to the ILO, “individuals with a combination of skills, such as broad-based education and training, basic and portable high-level skills, including teamwork, problem-solving, information and communications technology (ICT) and communication and language skills are most employable and adaptable to changes in the world of work.” Thus, to enable youth to secure rewarding employment and achieve financial stability, skill development is a pressing need.

The Magic Bus India Foundation Livelihood Programme approach is in line with this. The NGO aims to equip youth with the skills and knowledge they need to adapt and succeed in the evolving job market. Since 2015, Magic Bus India Foundation has been empowering vulnerable youth between 18 to 25 years from India’s urban and peri-urban communities through the Livelihood Programme.

The NGO’s curriculum has a holistic design that covers a range of life skills and employability skills. The programme is being delivered by a team of over 800 employees, spread across 100 Livelihood centers and approximately 500 colleges. The organization’s programmes are backed by innovative technology tools, strong partnerships, and engagement with stakeholders. The duration of the NGO’s livelihood programmes varies between a two-month model and a 10-day bootcamp model.

The NGO’s outreach is widespread and includes young people from rural and urban areas, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA, single mothers and ex-army personnel. To date, the non-profit has skilled and placed more than 2 lakh youth in employment.

Holistic & Adaptable Programmes

According to McKinsey’s 2020 survey of business leaders regarding reskilling and skills gaps, there is a necessity to enhance the workforce’s proficiency in four categories of skills: digital, higher cognitive, social and emotional skills, along with adaptability and resilience.

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Over two months, Magic Bus India Foundation works with each youth, skilling them as per their unique needs and helping them build aspirations. A significant number of youth from underserved communities do not have clear aspirations due to a lack of knowledge, confidence, and career awareness. To help them navigate the challenges they may face on their journey towards employment, the programme provides them with interview preparation, mentoring, job placement support and even post-placement support.

Magic Bus India Foundation’s Connect With Work programme is conducted in colleges, with the primary objective of ensuring first-time graduate job seekers from underserved households have access to job opportunities. After 24 hours of basic skilling spread over one week, the NGO provides them with mentoring support for 12 months to ensure their continuity and sustenance in their job.

Mantasha grew up in a small hut in Vikhroli, a suburb of Mumbai, where she lived with her parents and two younger siblings. Her father, who sold toys outside a railway station, was the family’s only earning member. For many years, she had dreamed of someday securing a better future for herself and her family but despite having completed her 12th grade, she had no idea how to secure a formal job. As Mantasha hails from a marginalised community where girls face numerous restrictions, her parents planned to get her married once she turned 18. She knew that the only way to change their minds was to support herself.

Magic Bus met with Mantasha during a Livelihood Programme mobilisation drive in her neighbourhood. The organization’s team explained the need for certain job skills to secure and retain employment. Convincing her parents to allow her to join the programme was a big challenge. Through several counselling sessions with her parents, the NGO’s team explained the benefits of the programme and persuaded them to enroll her in the programme.

Over the course of two months, Mantasha learned 21st century life skills along with essential employability skills. The NGO trainers also prepared her for job interviews through mock-interview sessions. She struggled with learning digital literacy as she had no prior knowledge but with diligent practice, her skills steadily improved.

Initially, she was quiet and reserved. As the sessions progressed, the transformation in Mantasha was evident and she began to participate in discussions. After completing the training, Magic Bus India Foundation connected her to several job interviews, and she was selected at Beyond Enough.

"My family is so proud of me as I am the first female earning in my family. I can confidently converse with my colleagues and customers in English, which I thought I would never be able to do. I feel empowered and independent. Without this programme, I would have never been able to achieve my dreams of supporting my family," shares Mantasha.
Partners for a Purpose
Magic Bus India Foundation believes that collaboration is key to achieving sustainable development goals. The non-profit works closely with local communities and leverage partnerships with government agencies, foundation and institutions and corporates, to scale up and deliver its programmes effectively. Through these collaborations, the NGO can also identify emerging trends and opportunities in industries and adapt its programmes to meet the changing needs of the workforce. Magic Bus India Foundation has forged several strategic partnerships to deliver its Livelihood Programme.

The NGO’s partnership with Prince’s Trust International sees fruition in the Get Into programme, which adopts a sector-specific employability skilling approach. The non-profit develops the curriculum as per the needs of an employer partner in order to close the skill gap they are experiencing.

Through a strategic partnership with Michael Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF), the NGO conducts the FutureX programme to impart life and employability skills to youth. It has a blended-skilling programme approach, through which the non-profit conducts in-person and virtual sessions by leveraging technology and adopting a collaborative, peer-learning approach.

Magic Bus India NGO also conducts digital skilling programmes in Accounting ERP and Cloud Skilling in partnership with Tally and AWS. This enables youth to secure white-collar jobs and grow in their careers.

Magic Bus India Foundation was selected as one of the first NGOs and implementation partners in India’s first Skill Impact Bond (SIB) launched by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in 2022. The project has a target enrolment of 80% women and addresses a few key challenges which India faces today. This includes skilling the huge population of youth, connecting them with sustainable jobs and improving the participation rate of women in the labour force which stands below 20% nationally.

CSR plays a key role in accelerating the scale of development programmes. The NGO’s corporate partners include industry giants such as J.P. Morgan, Accenture, Microsoft and many more.

A Diverse Outreach
According to the UN Population Statistics, India is projected to witness an increase of 183 million people in its working age group by 2050. Moreover, India is anticipated to contribute 22% of the global workforce over the next three decades. Magic Bus India Foundation is now working to skill and place over 100,000 youth annually. This is how the non-profit aims to shift the narrative for India’s youth and work towards achieving global Sustainable Development Goals such as No Poverty and Decent Work and Economic Growth.
Rural Revolution

HDFC Bank Parivartan, the bank’s flagship CSR programme, has transformed more than 9.8 crore lives in over a million households across the country.

Ashutosh, aged 35, works as a farm labourer in Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu. Her husband works in the city as a security guard, and she raises their two children at home. It is incredibly hard to make ends meet because of limited economic opportunities available in her village. Her situation is common for 48% women living in 664,369 Indian villages. Almost 75% of such rural women are agricultural workers. India, home to one-sixth of all humanity, is the key to the long-term success of the 2030 SDG goals. However, attaining SDG goals without a robust rural development program focused on bringing rural women to the centre stage will be challenging.

This is where HDFC Bank Parivartan, the bank’s flagship CSR programme, works towards the socio-economic development of the society by sustainably empowering communities. It focuses on six areas: Environment, Rural Development, Education, Skill Development & Livelihood Enhancement, Healthcare & Hygiene, and Financial Literacy. It has transformed more than 9.8 crore lives in over a million households across the country.

Amidst the wide range of interventions the Bank is undertaking, it is notable to see the sustainable change in the lives of people through the livelihood interventions. Following are three such initiatives undertaken by the Bank that are innovative, sustainable and scalable.

1. Water Hyacinth Handicraft project
2. Local Economic Activation Project (LEAP)
3. Three-Tier Vertical Livelihood Structure Model

From Weeds to Wealth: Water Hyacinth Handicraft Project

In January 2022, the Water Hyacinth Handicraft project was launched for 60 women beneficiaries. They were given specialized craft tool kits to use during their training and beyond. The project taught them how to make handicraft from water hyacinth, a weed that is abundant in more than half of the 400 villages in Thoothukudi district.

They were trained in correct ways of harvesting, grading, drying, and storing the water hyacinth stems. They were also introduced to four types of weaving for making baskets and flat products. Sewing machines were given to add value to the products. The training included stitching removable lining in fabric for laundry baskets and handbags. Wooden handles and woven multi-coloured straps were specially designed to match the products. The training advanced to dyeing the stem, welding and braising the metal armature, designing pleated techniques, and tufted products. The women were also trained in segregation, drying, and storage of the stem in white gunny bags for several days.

These products were also exhibited...
in Tuticorin and Coimbatore in August 2022. The project aimed to be sustainable and scalable by training ten people from each village in Thoothukudi district to produce commercially viable water hyacinth handicraft products. The government is planning to develop the model as a full-fledged program by forming a cooperative where skilled artisans would work and promote the Water Hyacinth Handicraft.

The project weaver groups shared sample products with IKEA through the creation of efficient, transparent and income-generating entrepreneurial platforms that facilitate sustainable livelihood enhancement. LEAP is taking the Self-Help-Group (SHG) movement to the next level by aggregating them in clusters for enterprises/income generation activities. The project was launched in 2022, and it aspires to accelerate the economic empowerment of women in the farm and non-farm sectors.

LEAP aims to achieve various objectives over four years, including increasing the real income of direct beneficiaries by 40%, benefiting over 500,000 women farmers and artisans spread over 120 clusters, leveraging new investments, including government schemes and private-sector investments, and enabling partnerships at the national, state and local level.

LEAP’s three-pronged income enhancement strategy includes improving income from existing occupations, adding another income source, and convergence with government schemes, based on two fundamental pillars: cluster planning and a market-led approach. LEAP has made significant progress at the district and state levels in terms of outcomes, income increase, building stronger institutions, enabling convergence, and ensuring the creditworthiness of the borrowers. The project has extensive backing from government departments, and financial institutions have partnered with POs to offer credit and financial support for input and forward linkages.

The LEAP programme is being implemented in 24 districts in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Punjab and West Bengal. The team has been receiving tremendous support from respective state governments and their departments, such as the Department of Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural Development, and Planning. A unique feature of this project is digital literacy, transparency, and equipping rural women with greater digital know-how and capabilities, enabling them to function independently in the long run without any external support.

LEAP’s impact so far includes the mobilization of 35,117 women beneficiaries into POs, the registration of 95 POs, INR 35 million share capital by PO members, and 11 sanctioned Common Facility Centers. LEAP has leveraged approximately INR 260 million, sanctioned INR 10.05 million in credit, recorded 9,273 digital transactions, availed 23,716 central and state schemes, and trained 22,179 women beneficiaries on best practices.

**Building Dreams, Floor by Floor: Three-Tier Vertical Livelihood Structure Model**

Ajay Kumar lives in Gondey, Pratapgarh, in Uttar Pradesh, with his parents and two younger brothers. He is physically challenged and comes from a landless family. His daily wages are his only source of income. He abandoned studies to support his family. He is discriminated due to his disability. The bank created a three-tier vertical livelihood structure model to provide a stable source of income for him. HRDP Pratapgarh built two vertical livelihood structures (as a prototype) for three livelihood activities simultaneously. 1) Fisheries 2) Poultry; 3) Goats.}

The structure has three floors to breed fish on the ground floor, poultry on the first floor, and goats on the second floor. The chickens eat goat waste, and fish eat chicken and goat waste. Additionally, chick and fish feeds are also given to boost their growth and reduce risk from diseases.

This livelihood structure demonstrates other village households to choose a model for a substantial revenue. Once developed, this structure will last at least 30 years for a one-time investment. This model could be shared with Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission for a state level team for large-scale adoption as a group enterprise with the most vulnerable/marginalized families. By lowering investment costs with landless families/people with physical disabilities, this model can be expanded up in new HRDP clusters.

In conclusion, one can see the transformative impact of all three initiatives—Water hyacinth projects, LEAP and the three-tier livelihood model. The Bank customised solutions leveraging locally available resources, markets and stakeholders. This helped persuading government and agencies to support the projects and create long-term impact. All the three projects also influenced cultural perspectives about women and people with disabilities. HDFC Bank Parivartan is committed to help India achieve SDG goals through its robust rural development focus, and take all stakeholders together in its stride.

In Tuticorin and Coimbatore in August 2022. The project aimed to be sustainable and scalable by training ten people from each village in Thoothukudi district to produce commercially viable water hyacinth handicraft products. The government is planning to develop the model as a full-fledged program by forming a cooperative where skilled artisans would work and promote the Water Hyacinth Handicraft.

The project weaver groups shared sample products with IKEA through the creation of efficient, transparent and income-generating entrepreneurial platforms that facilitate sustainable livelihood enhancement. LEAP is taking the Self-Help-Group (SHG) movement to the next level by aggregating them in clusters for enterprises/income generation activities. The project was launched in 2022, and it aspires to accelerate the economic empowerment of women in the farm and non-farm sectors.

LEAP aims to achieve various objectives over four years, including increasing the real income of direct beneficiaries by 40%, benefiting over 500,000 women farmers and artisans spread over 120 clusters, leveraging new investments, including government schemes and private-sector investments, and enabling partnerships at the national, state and local level.

LEAP’s three-pronged income enhancement strategy includes improving income from existing occupations, adding another income source, and convergence with government schemes, based on two fundamental pillars: cluster planning and a market-led approach. LEAP has made significant progress at the district and state levels in terms of outcomes, income increase, building stronger institutions, enabling convergence, and ensuring the creditworthiness of the borrowers. The project has extensive backing from government departments, and financial institutions have partnered with POs to offer credit and financial support for input and forward linkages.

The LEAP programme is being implemented in 24 districts in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Punjab and West Bengal. The team has been receiving tremendous support from respective state governments and their departments, such as the Department of Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural Development, and Planning. A unique feature of this project is digital literacy, transparency, and equipping rural women with greater digital know-how and capabilities, enabling them to function independently in the long run without any external support.

LEAP’s impact so far includes the mobilization of 35,117 women beneficiaries into POs, the registration of 95 POs, INR 35 million share capital by PO members, and 11 sanctioned Common Facility Centers. LEAP has leveraged approximately INR 260 million, sanctioned INR 10.05 million in credit, recorded 9,273 digital transactions, availed 23,716 central and state schemes, and trained 22,179 women beneficiaries on best practices.

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Sustainability and Digitization
- the Double Transformation

The sustainability transformation is fundamentally changing our economy and society. The impact is even greater than with digitization, writes Prof. Dr. Anabel Ternès. The double transformation will only succeed if we think sustainability and digitization together.

Sustainability has become increasingly important in recent years, and for good reason. It’s not just about protecting our environment, but also about shaping a better future for all of us. While digitization has simplified and improved our lives in many ways, it has also had a negative impact on the environment. Sustainability, on the other hand, aims to minimize these impacts while improving people’s quality of life.

Climate change is the biggest challenge facing society today. Due to the increasing use of fossil fuels and the resulting global warming, we face the threat of extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and loss of biodiversity. Sustainability offers a solution here by relying on renewable energy, reducing CO₂ emissions and halting climate change.

But sustainability is not just about the environment; it also has social and economic dimensions. A sustainable economy ensures a fair distribution of resources and creates jobs that are sustainable in the long term. A sustainable society ensures that people live together fairly and promotes education and health.

True sustainability can only be achieved by changing consumption habits.

An important step on the way to a sustainable society is to change our consumption habits. We need to realize that everything we buy has an impact on the environment. By buying products that have a long lifespan, are made from sustainable materials and can be easily recycled, we help reduce our impact on the environment. Companies need to design their products and services so that the better choice for consumers is always the more sustainable choice.

Another important aspect is changing our mobility. By switching to public transportation, bicycles or electric vehicles, we reduce CO₂ emissions and contribute to cleaner air.

Everyone can make a contribution, whether by buying sustainable products, avoiding unnecessary plastic or saving energy. But the influence of companies and governments is even greater: they must do their part to achieve the Paris climate targets - and other sustainability goals. They must ensure that the products and services they provide are sustainable and reduce their environmental impact. They also need to invest in renewable energy and take action to stop climate change.

Digitization as a transformation tool

Digitization has become an important transformation tool in recent years. It enables companies to optimize processes, reduce costs and increase productivity. It also makes it possible to develop business models and open up new markets.

It’s not a matter of either or - digitization or sustainability. We can only shape our future in a way that is worth living by thinking both areas together. A higher-faster-further just is worth living by thinking both areas together. A higher-faster-further just is worth living by thinking both areas together.

Digitization needs sustainability as a regulator and sense-giver.

On the other hand, sustainability benefits from digitization. Only in this way can processes, content and workflows be shared quickly and widely. It is the only way that large amounts of data can be collected, analyzed and used. Only in this way can companies make the best decisions and also optimize business processes in the direction of sustainability.

Transformative power of sustainability

Sustainability can bring about a multitude of positive changes in companies - long-term success and profit while thinking and acting in a way that is suitable for grandchildren as part of a whole-system approach.

Companies like Patagonia have been demonstrating for years that social, environmental and economic issues can successfully go hand in hand: The company has set itself the goal of creating a sustainable value chain, is committed to combating the waste of resources and to using natural and sustainable materials.

Sustainability requires entrepreneurial rethinking

Even digitization could not be implemented in companies at the push of a button. So anyone who thinks that sustainability can be “bought in” is mistaken. Sustainability requires, among other things

1. more than thinking in terms of one-year cycles, such as the P&L - instead, long-term 3, 5 and 10-year plans
2. more than training only for those employees who are perceived as high potentials - instead, high-quality training for everyone
Sustainability is Everyone’s Responsibility; the Moment to Act has Arrived

- By Arnold Su

The world has recognized the importance of sustainability and the actions that must be implemented in order to move towards a greener planet. It is no longer a choice, but rather, a need of the hour. Climate change has had a significant influence on global development, prompting an increased realization that extreme weather not only impacts our environment but also puts organizations’ operational resilience to the test. According to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), greenhouse gas (GHG) caused by human activity has already caused a global temperature rise of 1.1°C. Reaching net zero CO₂ emissions globally will be a key turning point to achieving the aim of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. To achieve the objectives, during COP26, India pledged to reduce its emissions to net zero by 2070. Further, it committed to obtaining 50% of its energy from renewable resources by 2030 as well as reducing overall estimated carbon emissions by one billion tonnes by the same year. To realize the aim, the country submitted the Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy (LTS) to the UNFCCC in November 2022. The LTS is a blueprint for using technology research and development along with climate governance as the basis for gradually completing strategies of the energy transition, industrial transition, lifestyle transition, and social transition to reach its goal of net zero emissions by 2070. Therefore, the transition to a ‘net zero’ era, requires a lot of hard work and persistence from international organizations, government bodies, large enterprises, and individuals alike.

To contribute to the overall sustainability agenda, we must revisit our habits and unlearn behaviors that cause irreversible damage to the environment. An average Indian, for example, participates in the emission of 1.9 tons of CO₂, contributing to an already significant carbon footprint. While there are steps that are being undertaken at a policy level, it is important to note that as individuals, we can choose sustainable living and contribute to the acceleration of sustainability. As per a report by the United Nations, sustainable living means understanding how our lifestyle choices impact the world around us and finding ways for everyone to live a better and healthier lifestyle.

How can we accomplish that? The answer is simple - we can start by educating ourselves and relooking at the impact we make on the environment. As an individual, we can start by switching to a minimal lifestyle, for instance, checking labels for biodegradability while shopping, using shared transportation, choosing natural materials for clothing, and recycling are some of the ways to transition to sustainable living. Another step to sustainable living is zero-waste living. While the two terms are often used interchangeably, it is important to note the difference. While largely similar, zero waste aims to reduce the trash problem by adopting a no-food-waste or using modes of transport with minimal or no carbon emission.

While these individual measures will undoubtedly make a positive impact to foster the natural habitat; organizations and enterprises are taking cognizance of adopting sustainable practices and technology that enables them to operate with conscious efforts to give back to society and the natural ecosystem. For instance, green data centres, managing electronic waste, and using compostable materials to engineer electronics are some of the steps being undertaken by businesses.

Advocating for and embedding strategic sustainability into the core operations and value creation is important, however, more needs to be done collectively. From a long-term sustainability perspective, organizations must ‘digitize data and embrace scientific management practices’ to identify major climate risks and simulate possible future scenarios of climate financial impacts. They must design a framework to proactively plan for climate measures. This includes improving R&D capabilities in software and hardware to improve product energy efficiency, driving the supply chain toward low-carbon manufacturing, expanding the use of renewable energy, and developing innovative technologies to reduce the carbon footprint of corporate operations, manufacturing, and products.

The manufacturers may adopt approaches for enhancing energy efficiency, expanding the use of renewable energy, and removing residual emissions with innovative technologies to lead the value chain to net zero. Manufacturers should optimize processes for key components and identify hot spots for emissions such as equipment with high energy consumption and processes with high carbon emissions and devise carbon reduction measures. Collaborate with suppliers on projects with low carbon materials, improvement in equipment efficiency, and renewable energy to promote technology in carbon reduction.

In a nutshell, transformation in individual mindset is essential for a sustainable future. Technology and innovation will just make it better and faster. As long as sustainability is a priority for everyone, every contribution, no matter how big or small, may help to make the world a better, greener place. There are no two ways about it: the moment for change has arrived.

Arnold Su is Business Head, Consumer and Gaming PC, System Business Group, ASUS India.
Introducing DEVI SANSTHAN

DEVI Sansthan is a global non-profit organization at the forefront of spearheading educational transformation. With a vision of achieving universal literacy, DEVI Sansthan researches and implements techniques that are swift, scalable, and replicable, leading to significant and rapid change. The organization’s approach goes beyond literacy, integrating global citizenship skills, social-emotional-mental well-being, character development, climate consciousness, and essential skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. It employs storytelling and role plays to teach climate change knowledge, inspiring students to become climate activists while minimizing environmental impact through low-carbon footprint materials.

Accelerating Learning for All

At the heart of DEVI Sansthan’s transformative approach is Accelerating Learning for All (ALFA), a revolutionary program available in 30 languages worldwide. ALFA bypasses the traditional alphabet-based learning approach, utilizing the power of paired learning to fast-track Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in just 45 days. Since its launch in 2022, ALFA has grown swiftly, expanding from twenty schools in two districts to hundreds of schools across five districts. It is now slated for further expansion, including nationwide adoption in the Maldives.

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Impacts & Recognition

One notable achievement of DEVI Sansthan has been the large-scale survey conducted in the Lucknow district in 2015, which assessed the literacy levels of 1.5 million individuals. The results were published in esteemed journals, such as the Economic & Political Weekly of India and the Journal of New Economics at Glasgow University, UK. This research has been recognized globally and was even presented during COP26 by DEVI Sansthan’s founder, Dr. Sunita Gandhi.

Dr. Gandhi’s influential book, “Disruptive Literacy: A Roadmap for Urgent Global Action,” draws insights from people’s movements worldwide and advocates for mass mobilization as an effective strategy to improve literacy among adults and out-of-school children. DEVI Sansthan has also been implementing the Each One Teach One campaign since 2014, leveraging the efforts of 500,000 adolescent student volunteers.

The ALfA approach has gained support of leaders in India such as Rajnath Singh (Defence Minister), Yogi Adityanath (UP Chief Minister) and Anita Karwal (Former Secretary, Ministry of Education). It has also received extensive national and international press coverage, and was recently featured in a book by the Harvard Graduate School of Education.
Partnering for Change

DEVI Sansthan facilitates forums that bring together policy makers, educational thinkers, and practitioners to exchange ideas and collaborate. For instance, the Disruptive Talks for Literacy have featured over 180 speakers from 22 countries—including Robert Jenkins, UNICEF head of education & adolescent development, and Vicky Colbert, former Colombian education minister. There are many networking opportunities and cross-fertilisation of ideas and best practices at in-person events such as the EdLeadership Conference and Synergy Summit, as well as online meetings like the Policymakers Conclave.

DEVI Sansthan serves as a knowledge partner for numerous national and international NGOs, implementing community-based interventions to enhance Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) for children and illiterate adult women. The organization collaborates with diverse stakeholders, including Literacy Chicago in the USA, the Forum for African Women Educationists, Arca Beta in Peru, and the All-Africa Students Union, among others, to implement literacy programs worldwide. DEVI Sansthan’s collaboration with these stakeholders underscores its commitment to making a global impact on education.

By driving educational transformation and prioritizing universal literacy, DEVI Sansthan is paving the way for a brighter future. Through its research-backed techniques, global collaborations, and innovative ALfA program, the organization is equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in a rapidly changing world. DEVI Sansthan’s holistic approach, integrating literacy, global citizenship, and well-being, ensures that education goes beyond traditional boundaries, empowering learners to become active participants in shaping a better society.