

# 100 Stories of Change..

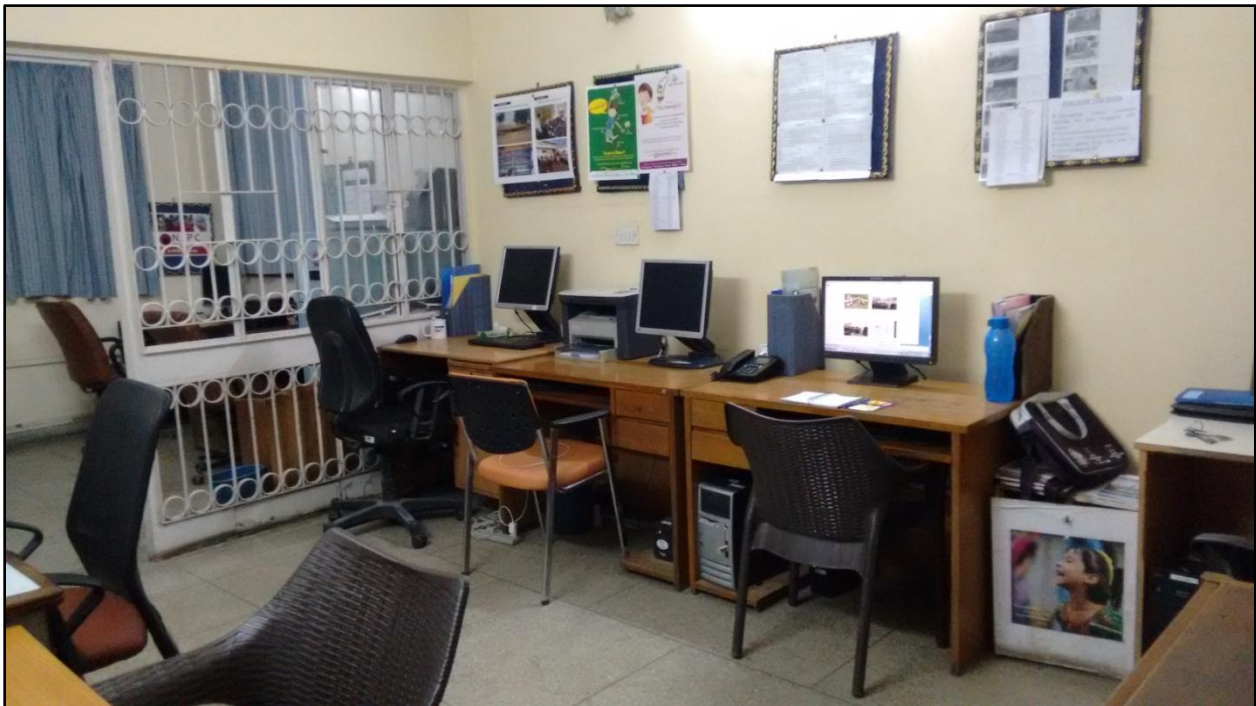


by Goonj..

30<sup>th</sup>

Story

## Giving a new lease of life..



The '100 stories of Change' is a heartening exercise at Goonj as its taking us back to the years gone by, to notice how a thought blossomed into a way of life, to realize how the little things turned into big things. This story truly starts with our initial years of constraints and how frugality and simplicity drove us to innovate ways to work on some non issues. Today it is one of our guiding principles, as put across succulently by Mahatma Gandhi "live simply, so others may simply live."

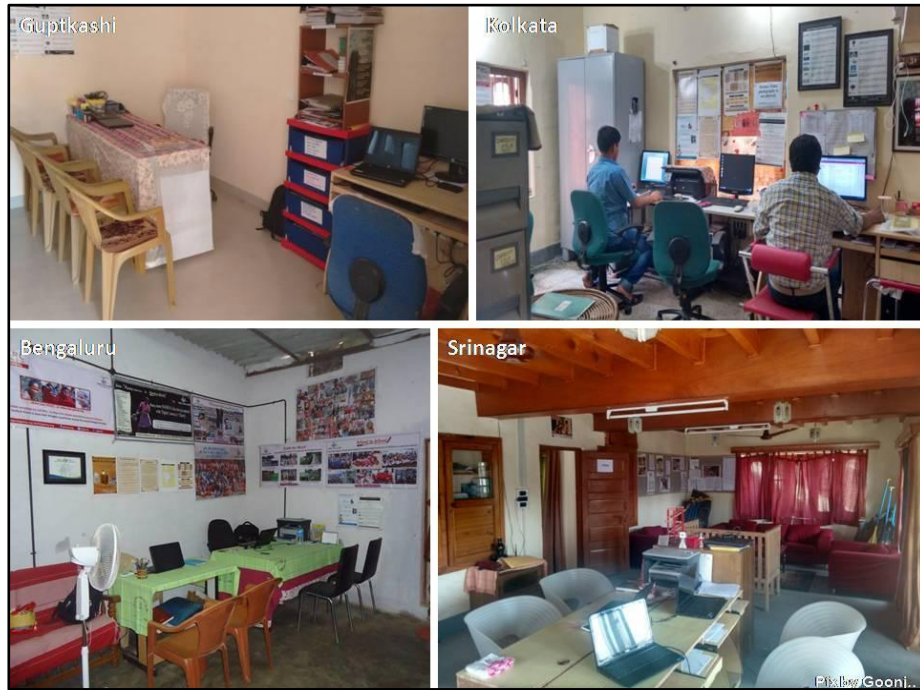
Goonj was a tiny thought born in a small flat of a middle class family in Delhi which has today grown to 12 offices across India. The initial years of struggle in the absence of funds and the middle class pride to not ask drove us to invent ways of dealing with day to day issues. "In the initial years there were times when even paying the basic salary to the team was a challenge. With time of course things have improved but that phase

taught us a lot about how we want Goonj to be.” says Anshu Gupta, our Founder Director.

If you ever come to our Delhi office, the flat where it all started.. And meet with our team, please look out for the small center table which sits there valiantly even after multiple repairs and fixing jobs.. At Goonj no office furniture has been bought in the last



16 years. It's the same story for hundreds of computers, stationary or basic structures we have across the country.. Why? Because we believe we must spend as little as possible on ourselves.. Because we believe if we ask the world to reuse, recycle, we must walk our talk.. If you ever come to a Goonj office in any part of the country, finding matching furniture is a rarity that we are proud of.. These chairs, tables and stools of different shapes and designs certainly act as a reminder of why we do what we do..They connect us deeply with the homes, corporates and schools from



where we get these things. For us it's a question of bringing a synergy in the doing, saying and thinking..



It's not an easy task for sure.. When you have a team of 300 plus with most under 30's.. Mental comparisons with the swanky offices of other well known organizations are bound to happen. What helps is when you see some of the senior most Goonj team members not having a permanent seat at all!! With so many people there is a need for



Ladies working in Processing centre



more furniture and infrastructure to work efficiently.. Be it a desk or a dari.. Since everything is being contributed by people there is no expenditure head as Furniture & fittings in our balance sheet as we never spend on it..

Some of you who have visited Goonj's processing center in Delhi or other cities will hopefully know what we mean. The first processing center in Delhi started in one room accommodating all types of material. Today it spreads across an area of more than 10,000 sq feet with different sections for every article that we receive. This meant creating many different enclosures and partitions not just in Delhi but in most cities

where we replicated our processes and systems. This made us creatively use all kinds of things like the ply of a broken carom or a broken bed or even folding benches. In each unit, starting from the sorting unit to the Green by Goonj products workshop or display, the separate cabins, pin boards, media boards and cupboards etc. are all made from discarded ply wood. All the tables, chairs, stools used by our processing teams are

also contributed by the masses. Today the many different curtains up in our different offices is a gentle reminder of the love and care people must put in to chose them for their homes.

This transformation has off course been organic and spread over years of work.. Team members like Alok (Delhi office) who was just a novice at carpentry; have now gained expertise in converting all kinds of kabaad into jugaad. Be it notice boards, boxes or cabinets or even fixing and fitting work, he is there with his creative understanding of the need.. Here's an example.. In the 1st floor Not Just a Piece of Cloth (NJPC) unit in Delhi, one step in the process of making MY Pads involves Sun drying the cloth on the terrace of an adjoining building. Instead of wasting time and efforts in lugging buckets all the way down and up two buildings the team came up with a pulley made from skates from a roller skate shoes, for lifting the buckets of washed clothes from one building to the 3rdfloor terrace of the other building ..



16 years of this journey has seen the work grow manifold. Goonj's Kolkata office started from a team members home.. A carton became the table and in absence of chairs the team used to sit on the floor. Today our intervention across north eastern region is handled from our Kolkata office. The Goonj Mumbai office got flooded in 2011 but was up and running within a few weeks and is today the third biggest operation within Goonj.

If you ever happen to visit any one of our three local hub offices in Rishikesh, Uttarkashi & Guptakashi you will notice that every single thing is reused or repurposed.. The team



members in our Uttarkashi office were motivated to set up an office using trash.. They collected 9 same size empty biscuit and medicine cartons and filled them with waste cloth, paper and newspapers. These were placed against three walls of the office room and covered with sheets and stitched together with pins to give a nice look of a sofa/settee.. This creativity continued for making the office table as well. Our offices are a treasure trove of such stories, where each thing speaks of the innovation and creativity applied by someone.



Today our biggest challenges are the ever rising costs around rentals, logistics and salaries where our practices of recycle and reuse have definitely helped by bringing frugality to every aspect of work. In the next story we will share how passing this lesson of reuse and recycle to our grassroots partner organizations struggling with the basic infrastructure needs, enabled and motivated them and us to focus on more hard pressing requirements of people.

So, any kind of furniture with you, right from Sofa, chairs, dining tables or cupboards in good and working condition is more than welcome to spend its second term in the service of another part of the country.

---