



Flexing the Gaps..



We've all heard the famous dictums that 'if life gives you a lemon, make lemonade out of it.' Simply put, it means that if life gives you a challenge; make an opportunity out of it. This story shines a light on how innovative ideas can turn around the most complex issues.

Banners are a common nuisance, a necessary evil and a part and parcel of our urban landscape. Most are made of what we commonly call flex (poly-vinyl chloride), a material similar to plastic. Its durability and cost effectiveness makes it a preferred material for display. Like plastic Flex is harmful since it doesn't dissolve on its own but an effort to use it in alternative ways for some good can considerably reduce the harmful effects to a large extent.

This story is about how we make lemonade out of this tough lemon, by creatively connecting it to the challenges of the people we work with.



At Goonj we get a lot of flex. Back in 2013, we used a big flex roll (contributed by a corporate) to cover the leaking roof of a school in the higher interiors of Gangori in Uttarkashi (Achrumul Saraswati Shishu Mandir School). For more than one year the school was saved from ongoing worry and misery in monsoons due to this flex. Flex pieces were also sent to various villages in Uttron & Nald (Uttarakhand) for various occasions. During the Uttarakhand floods when we asked the masses to contribute their used flex, the same was put to multiple uses; on Goonj center flooring to guard against moisture and cold, covering a lot of shanties (labor tin sheds) spread across far flung tough terrains of Uttarkashi and Guptkashi. Our 2700 sq ft processing center at Rishikesh is still floored with the flex, to ease the severe cold for the team working there and also to make it easier to clean the cemented flooring.

Reena, a Goonj Delhi team member shares how the idea of using flex (in making of Green by Goonj products) struck her, ‘I was discussing about a product with Bijay ji (the workshop supervisor). I needed to buy a lot of Bukram to ensure stiffness in our products. One day I experimented with flex and used it instead of Bukram (as a base in making a men’s wallet). It worked beautifully. Gradually we started using flex in many of our Green by Goonj recycled product. It’s definitely made our products more durable and strong.’

These flexes have also been very useful in protecting our walls from moisture especially where there is an absence of direct sunlight. As a result flexes have been sent to our offices in Bihar, Uttarakhand and Odisha as well. This in turn has helped in safeguarding our material stocks across the country. In Goonj’s warehouse in Bihar (Bargaon- Saharsa district) a thick layer of the flex was used as roofing in order to cover it.

After the 2008 Bihar floods, we were making a lot of stitching centers using local resources (Bamboo) and renovating abandoned structures under Goonj’s CFW initiative. Flex was used for roofing and covering the walls of these centers. Over the years these center have provided livelihood to many women in the neighboring 6 to 7 villages. At the Goonj stitching Center at Keshopur (Medhepura district) alone, so far 750 girls and women have undergone training while many have gone on to purchase their own stitching machines.



Flexes are also being used as sitting mats in various schools; cut into pieces and used like a dari where there was nothing or a tattered mat to sit on earlier. At many Chehak Centers started by Goonj (informal tuition centers, complementing the formal government school education) flex is taking the place of the expensive tarpaulin, while the same funds are used for other pressing needs. Two Chehak Centres (one in Saharsa and another in Purnea district) are currently operational with over 200 children. The parents take the ownership of the center. Goonj continues its material support to run these centers.

A innovative idea we have recently implemented is about the Flex pouches we are giving out with Goonj MY Pads(cloth sanitary pads) to women in far flung villages. These pouches are useful for women who step out of their homes to work in the day. Most don't have any place to securely and cleanly keep their used cloth for washing and reusing later.



Keeping in mind this practical difficulty, the little pouch made from flex banners and tarps (used ones) are leak proof, cheap and a sustainable way of making reuse of cloth possible. The idea came from a Goonj team member who uses My Pad herself. She pointed out the need for having something to store it until she found a place to either dispose it or wash it. So far more than 13,000 such pouches have been made and reached out in many states like Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Bengal, MP apart from many slums of Delhi and NCR along with the 'My Pad'.

This story is also about another dictum given by our founder.. ‘Let’s improve the world before we change it.’ We are doing our bit by reusing these flexes in the best way possible. We are sure that there are many other solutions but it’s surely a step in the right direction.



What can you do.. Now that you know that right from giving roof to the people living in makeshift shanties to a pouch for sanitary napkin and everything else in between, it can fill a lot of critical gaps.. Now we hope that after reading this story, you know where to give those used flex/banners that have served their purpose for the events in your schools, showrooms, offices and neighborhood.. Also, Tell us if you know what happens to all the flex used in display across the country? We also look forward to your views, ideas and suggestions on this idea.

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