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GOONJ.. a voice, an effort
www.goonj.org

TAMIL NADU

State Impact Report



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About Goonj

Goonj, literally translated, means an echo. Every moment, we try to listen, with our ear to the ground, for unheard voices, connecting our doing with what we hear and echoing it in the world. Founded in 1999, Goonj has been addressing basic but often ignored needs of people with all that the world has, advocating for a comprehensive human dignity and agency-led approach. We see cloth and dignity as two metaphors for the neglected needs of humanity.

Since its inception, Goonj has focussed on building an equitable relationship of strength, sustenance and dignity between the resourceful and resource-less. On one hand, is the surplus of the affluent and on the other is the unrecognised wisdom, hard work, efforts and knowledge of people, both unexplored assets that can impact the most challenging issues plaguing the world.

At Goonj, we create a barter and relationship of sustenance between these as two new alternate currencies and sector-agnostic tools, to address issues. By establishing a culture and mechanism of sustained mindful giving (at both ends) grounded in dignity and empathy, we nudge people to take ownership of addressing issues as equal stakeholders in the world.

Nudging stakeholders to create value for a better world. Working with hundreds of cross sector partnerships, our work mobilises and motivates constructive participation from common people in cities and villages across India, creating a platform for exchange and value creation for the individual and the community.

We grow in our work by finding new ways for our stakeholders to create and retain more value in their lives and communities.

Pan India Impact

More than **18 million** lives touched

63 million kgs of material channelised

9 million cloth sanitary pads
(MY Pad) made

96,000+ community development projects
implemented under the Cloth For Work initiative

Over **1 million** person-days of work generated by
repurposing cloth into daily utility items

(Data of last ten years from 2014 to 2024)

Recognitions

Goonj has received national and international recognition on innovation, entrepreneurship, governance and public service. These include the -

- **2015 Magsaysay Award to Goonj Founder Anshu Gupta**
- **World Bank's Development Marketplace Award**
- **Changemakers Innovation Award**
- **Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Fair Business Practices**
- **Goonj's Founder, is also an Ashoka and Schwab Fellow.**

A Resilient Circular Economy for Interconnected and Unified Futures:



Goonj's model is a re-envisioning of development, where urban and rural areas are not separate entities but interconnected parts of a unified, resilient circular economy. By channeling urban surplus to rural needs, Goonj has catalyzed a system in which resources have ongoing social and economic impact across regions. Through this holistic systems-change approach, Goonj has demonstrated, with evidence, the power of interconnected development, linking urban material abundance to rural resilience and creating a mutually beneficial system where both sectors thrive. Through a structured process Goonj builds pathways for meaningful engagement, creating a collaborative ecosystem where urban and rural communities directly contribute to each other's growth. This connection fosters a shared responsibility and understanding, making urban communities more aware of rural realities and enabling rural areas to access essential resources without dependence on charity.

Key Initiatives

Rural Development - Cloth For Work (CFW) mobilises, motivates and empowers communities by creating a barter between urban surplus and rural labour and wisdom. Positive impact on material poverty, community assets, local self-sufficiency, neglected issues and local biodiversity.

Menstrual Health and Hygiene - Not Just A Piece of Cloth (NJPC) mainstreams menstruation as a human issue with attention to women's voice, dignity and health. Using surplus cloth to produce cloth sanitary pads and using them to hold pan India 'Break The Silence' dialogues and community-led local action, on women's menstrual issues.

Education - School to School (S2S) fills the material gaps in rural education by repurposing unused urban school material to mobilise, motivate and empower school children and the local community to create consistent learning opportunities in their villages. Simultaneously, S2S raises awareness among urban students about the challenges faced in rural education, building empathy and social responsibility.

Disaster Response and Resilience - RAHAT is rapid, proactive, people-led disaster relief, rehabilitation, mitigation and long-term awareness building in non-disaster times. Goonj's 26 years work at the frontlines of dignifying response and mitigation around climate emergencies, has consistently respected the place based wisdom, voice and efforts of the most affected communities—ensuring that our interventions are not only effective but also nudge for self sufficiency and long term sustainable development. In this way Goonj's relief work connects to the long tailed holistic development approach that builds resilience of communities for future challenges.

With Goonj's Societal Alliance for Resilience and Response to Disasters (SARRD) framework, we aim to bring together diverse stakeholders, center rehabilitation around community decision making and action to build a sustainable, dignified societal response to climate emergencies. With Alliance Goonj is also nudging for proactive resource commitment, enabling structured, rapid responses instead of fragmented, reactionary intervention. To know more- <https://goonj.org/sarrd/>

Gram Swabhimaan - Reimagining Village's Self-worth Launched in 2021, Gram Swabhimaan, as the name suggests, is a deeper journey, imagined by our founder Anshu Gupta, - nudging village communities to shift how they perceive themselves by reigniting their dignity and pride in what they have. Through sustained dialogues and listening sessions, Gram Swabhimaan teams facilitate the communities in amplifying their grassroots wisdom, local resources, and traditional skills—walking alongside them as enablers. Gram Swabhimaan is a strategic conversation and reflective deep dive into shifting peoples' narrative from "what's missing?" to "what's already here." To know more- <https://anshugupta.org/gram-swabhimaan/>

Green By Goonj (GBG) - Upcycling and Sustainability is a range of handcrafted, unique products for daily living, special events and gifting for sustainable urban living. The range of products made by Green by Goonj for rural living and basic needs extends the material circularity for development.



Goonj In Tamil Nadu

The Beginning

Goonj's work in Tamil Nadu started in 2004 with relief efforts following the Tsunami. Post Tsunami relief work the local government handed over 100 trucks of surplus cloth (contributed by people from across the country for the affected people, but lying unused) to Goonj. Our founder, Anshu Gupta, made his personal mission to turn this material into a valuable resource for development work. A small team worked for close to two years, sorting and channelising material and also creating products, made from recycled material, for rural needs. This was where the first version of MY Pad, Goonj's cloth pad was prototyped. Goonj's work in the state evolved from this point, with relief efforts towards enabling longer-term community led development. Also reflecting Goonj's approach to connect the disaster affected communities to their own wisdom and efforts led development.

The Evolution

We began our journey in Chennai after the 2004 Tsunami. Following our relief work during the 2015 floods, we re-established our presence by setting up the Goonj Center of Circularity. At this time Goonj team reached out to over 5,000 families in the flood-affected parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh through channelisation of essentials in need based Rahat relief kits. Our relief work began in Chengalpattu, eventually reaching out to communities in Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur, Tirutanni, Cuddalore, Chidambaram and Mayiladuthurai. A group of local volunteers played an important role in this phase and many of them later joined our team.

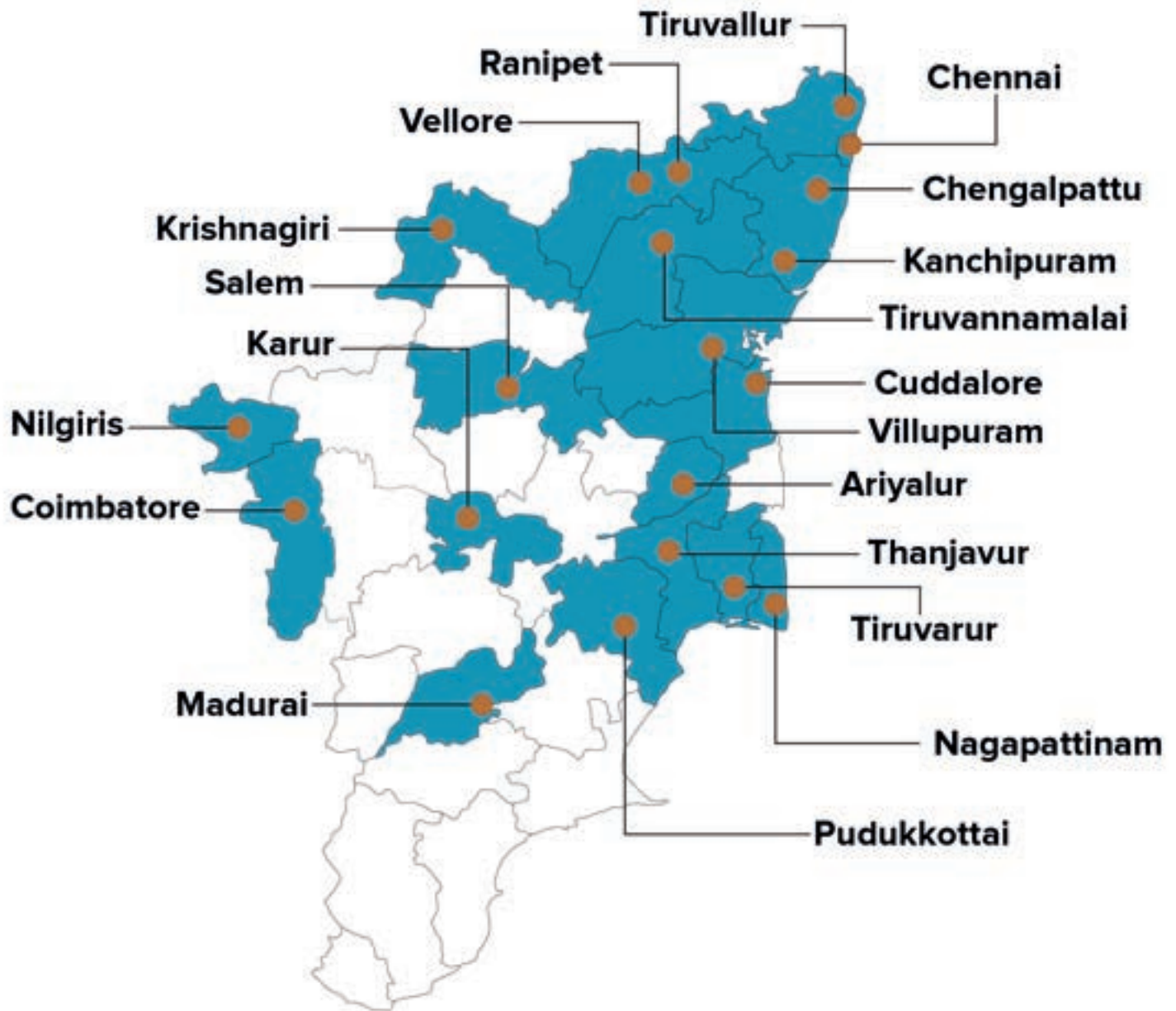
Over the years Goonj teams based in the Goonj Chennai Center of Circularity have worked alongside communities during various disasters such as Cyclone Gaja, Cyclone Vardah, and the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022 Tamil Nadu Floods, and as recent as Cyclone Fenghal. In disaster response work, our focus has consistently been on transitioning disaster affected communities from charity based relief work to mobilising them to be their own decision makers and action takers to revive, repair and and develop their own broken ecosystems.



2004 picture of post tsunami clothes (Chennai warehouse)

Our Reach

Over the past 10 years, we have expanded across 20 districts in the state of Tamil Nadu.



A Decade in Review: Tamil Nadu Highlights

COMMUNITY LED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- 3,500+ community led rural development projects
- 2000+ initiatives taken up by communities for strengthening water access
- 900+ of these on sanitation-related issues
- 500+ of these on agriculture
- Working in partnership with a network of over 90 grassroots organisations

ENABLING RURAL EDUCATION

- 30,000+ school kits channelised, filling gaps in learning material

MENSTRUAL WELLBEING

- 500,000+ MY Pads (cloth pads) channelised
- 1,000+ menstrual awareness sessions with communities held


DISASTER RESPONSE

- 70,000+ families reached with need based kits who were affected by COVID, floods, cyclones and fires

URBAN OPERATIONS*

- 700+ awareness cum collection camps organised

*This data is only for the period 2014 to 2024.



People-Led Approaches to Rural Impact and Development

In Tamil Nadu, we have been working closely with local rural communities on their development issues. Our efforts build on lessons learned from disasters such as floods and cyclones. Over the years rural communities have chosen to focus on five key areas: **water, sanitation, development of community assets to improve access, agriculture, and environment**. Drawing on their own local knowledge, efforts and local resources, these initiatives have enabled in improving water access for farming and daily needs, encouraged biodiversity conservation, and enabled collaborative approaches to agricultural challenges in farming communities.

Goonj's work has been focussed on mobilising people to identify and decide their own issues and motivate them to design their own solutions with their own wisdom, efforts and local resources. Goonj teams in Tamil Nadu also do the work of filling gaps and enabling communities in this process. The carefully curated material kits (created from urban surplus material) are given as a reward for peoples' efforts for their own development work. This material, lying unused in urban households, thus becomes a new currency, a new nudge and facilitator for rural communities led development.

Partnerships and collaborative work is at the heart of our rural development work. They play a key role in providing local expertise, cultural insights and rapid mobilization during emergencies. Currently, we are working in partnership with **over 90 grassroots organizations** in Tamil Nadu.

We partnered with SWEET Trust to advance environmental sustainability initiatives in Tamil Nadu's rural communities. Together, we engaged with the people of Sullangudi village in Thirumanur block, Ariyalur district, to introduce impactful ecological practices. Through this collaboration, Goonj extended expertise and motivation, while SWEET Trust mobilized local participation. Our combined effort encouraged villagers, especially women, to adopt the practice of making and distributing seed balls- simple yet powerful tools for forest regeneration. This partnership catalyzed collective action: 75 women repaired a crucial water channel and prepared 4,000 seed balls with native seeds, dispersing them along water bodies to foster long-term ecological restoration and strengthen the community's connection to their natural environment.



Strengthening Water Access



The Challenge: Access to clean and reliable water is an important part of daily life in many communities, particularly in rural areas where water sources are closely tied to local weather and usage patterns. Seasonal changes sometimes mean families need to adjust their daily routines for activities such as farming, cooking, and maintaining hygiene, with special significance for women and children. Rural Tamil Nadu, like many other parts of India, faces a water challenge marked by depleting groundwater levels, erratic monsoons, and overdependence on borewells. Many factors around poor water governance have led to this situation. Women and children bear the brunt, often walking miles for daily water needs, while recurring droughts increase rural distress, migration, and debt. The urgency lies in building local water resilience through rainwater harvesting, tank restoration, and community-led water stewardship.

Goonj's Response: We work with communities across rural Tamil Nadu to mobilise collective action for improving their water access. Our approach focuses on mobilising people to address their own water issues, and motivating them to design and implement solutions that emerge from their own efforts, wisdom and local resources around them. Our consistent focus is for the adoption of long term sustenance led water conservation practices that build on grassroots knowledge and community-driven solutions. Over the past ten years (2014–2024), we have implemented more than 3,500 community-led rural development projects. Of these, over 2,000 initiatives focused specifically on strengthening water access- a critical intervention in a state like Tamil Nadu, where dry spells are frequent and livelihoods depend heavily on agriculture.

Reviving Paddy Fields and Preventing Floods: A People-Led Canal Cleaning Drive in Pannapattu Village, Tamil Nadu

In Pannapattu village, Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, agriculture is the way of life. Yet, consecutive crop failures had taken a toll. Two vital irrigation canals choked by thorny weeds stopped water from reaching fields. Crops suffered, paddy yields fell, incomes dropped, and hope faded.

When the Goonj team started working with the local community, they shared this issue. When Goonj mobilised the locals, they decided to make these canals usable again by cleaning them. As the water got restored with their efforts, it started to feed 50 acres of paddy flourishing, yielding 50-60 quintals per field, earning the local farmers ₹1-3 lakhs each season. The canals also helped prevent flash floods and supported year-round kitchen gardens amid unpredictable weather.

Along with the people of Pannapattu village, over 100 households in nearby villages including Sirukalur, Esanal, and Muglayur gained reliable irrigation, sparking plans for winter crops. This collective effort is a living example of decentralised community action and resilient change.

These community-led actions have contributed to improved water availability, created new opportunities for collaboration and skill-building, and strengthened self-reliance, supporting long-term development goals



Strengthening Health and Sanitation Facilities



The Challenge: Access to safe and hygienic sanitation is a key aspect of community health and dignity. In many areas, communities are exploring new methods to enhance sanitation facilities and hygiene awareness, further promoting well-being, especially for women, children, and vulnerable groups.

Goonj's Response: Our programs prioritise community-led initiatives to strengthen sanitation infrastructure and encourage safe hygiene practices and addresses menstrual wellbeing with awareness, access, affordability and action

Like a vast majority of women across India, there's still a culture of shame and silence that many women in Tamil Nadu face every month during their menstruation. In this coastal state, vulnerable to frequent floods and cyclones, women from farming communities, having limited resources, find it tough to prioritize their menstrual health and hygiene. When Goonj started working with women who had lost everything in floods our first goal was to reach the basics of a clean, reusable, affordable MY Pads (sanitary cloth pads) to these women. With our Menstrual Break the Silence Meetings, we have been holding space for better awareness and dialogue on women's menstrual wellbeing related local issues as well.

Most importantly Goonj mobilises and motivates women and their whole community to take collective action against their local menstrual issues. Under our menstrual health and hygiene initiative, Not Just A Piece Of Cloth (NJPC), our teams stand with the hundreds of rural women's communities, also teaching them how to make their own cloth pads.

Over the past decade, we have channeled more than 500,000 MY Pads (cloth sanitary pads) to women and girls in rural communities, empowering them to take collective action around menstrual wellbeing. Alongside this, we have facilitated over 1,000 menstrual health awareness sessions- sparking critical conversations, challenging taboos, and driving both social and behavioral change around menstruation within these communities.

Beyond Menstrual Myths: Growing Health and Hope in Alankuppam

In Alankuppam village, Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu, farming has long sustained village life. During a Goonj Break the Silence session, over 50 women gathered for an open dialogue, led by Goonj Tamil Nadu lead Anisha and her team. The discussion moved beyond hygiene, as women candidly shared their health struggles linked to menstruation, from infections to sleep disruption. The Goonj team introduced MY pads, highlighting their reuse, offering these women a familiar, affordable and easily accessible option for their wellbeing, dignity, and self-production.

Inspired by this collective energy, our teams mobilised the local women to envision and create a community kitchen garden. Together they transformed a 30-by-20 meter plot, nurturing lady's fingers, tomatoes, and peas. The harvest brought fresh food and vital income. For Sangeetha, the group's leader, "We didn't just grow vegetables, we grew our confidence." In Alankuppam, a dialogue blossomed into agency, health, and renewed self-belief.



Strengthening Sanitation

Access to proper sanitation is crucial for the health and well-being of communities. Inadequate sanitation facilities often lead to the spread of diseases, particularly affecting overlooked groups like women, children and the elderly.

A New Thread of Livelihood: Cloth Pads in Karmangdi Village

In Karmangdi village, Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, menstruation is traditionally celebrated as a three-day rite of passage. When the Goonj entered this village, this tradition took a new turn when women began a new conversation about their menstrual health and dignity with Goonj's 'Chuppi Todo Baithak' (break the silence meeting). During this dialogue women were introduced to MY Pads, cloth sanitary pads made in Goonj Chennai Center, from urban surplus cloth. Together with nudging awareness and dialogue in rural communities, these pads also tell a story of a dignified livelihood for women making these pads at Goonj Chennai Center.

In Karmangdi village, women showed interest in making these cloth pads, for themselves and other women in the village. This grassroots initiative transformed a taboo into a source of empowerment and livelihood. MY Pads stitched from local cloth and crafted by local hands, now symbolize agency, care, and restored dignity in Karmangdi. At Goonj, menstruation is not just a women's issue, it is recognized as a human issue.

Access: Strengthening Community Infrastructure



The Challenge: Reliable community infrastructure underpins well-being and social development. In several regions, ensuring quality facilities—including roads, community spaces, and learning environments makes daily life more convenient and resilient for all age groups, especially during adverse weather or emergencies

Goonj's Response: People's access to essential services and resources often depends on the strength and reliability of local infrastructure. Recognising this critical role of access infrastructure, communities across rural India have prioritised the building and repairing of their community assets.

Goonj has been addressing the educational needs of small and big rural and urban schools, creating a bridge between the abundance and scarcity but most importantly a bridge of learning about sustainability, through its School to School (S2S) initiative. By channelising surplus school materials from urban schools, Goonj goes beyond mere charity based distribution, instead using that learning material as a tool to minimise the divide of learning, with dignity.

Over the past ten years (2014-2024), we have channelised over 30,000 school kits to bridge the learning gaps by actively engaging with urban and rural teachers and parents to encourage their meaningful participation in the holistic development of children.

Venkatapuram: Where Children Grew a Garden and a New Way of Thinking

In Venkatapuram village, Tamil Nadu, Gyanodaya High School stands as a beacon of hope for 145 children, many from St. Thomas Leprosy Colony. Once aided to include children affected by leprosy, the school now welcomes students from across the community, fostering inclusive learning and growth.

When Team Goonj visited, open conversations sparked an idea: transform unused school land into a kitchen garden. Fifteen students led the way—organizing, planting, watering. Within a month, their efforts turned barren soil into a source of fresh food for mid-day meals. "This garden is our own—our pride and hard work," a student shared.

Learning flourished beyond classrooms. Over 130 children joined creative sessions; older students discussed leprosy awareness and mindful giving, challenging old biases. Goonj reached School to School kits to every child, as a reward and appreciation for their efforts. Here, children didn't just grow vegetables—they cultivated agency and belonging, redefining what a school can mean.



Agriculture and Environment: Enabling Sustainable Practices

The Challenge: Sustaining the environment and enhancing agricultural productivity are vital for community resilience and healthy living. Opportunities to increase green cover, support home-grown nutrition, and encourage environmental stewardship strengthen both food security and ecological balance.

Goonj's Response: As climate change intensifies, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters is growing, putting immense pressure on agriculture, the environment, and the livelihoods of underserved communities. In response, Goonj has increasingly focused on large-scale plantation efforts as a key part of its environmental interventions, empowering communities to take the lead in restoring ecosystems.

Seeding Change: How Women in Sullangudi Village Are Restoring Nature, One Seed Ball at a Time

In Sullangudi village, Ariyalur district, Tamil Nadu, the monsoon brought more than rain. It ignited a spark of hope. When the Goonj team introduced seed ball making, a simple method to restore native trees by planting seeds in clay balls, the community saw an opportunity to regenerate their environment naturally.

Seventy-five women stepped up, not only making seed balls but also restoring the village's water channel to nourish the lake and sustain local ecosystems. Twenty women rolled 4,000 seed balls by hand, each packed with native seeds. "We didn't just plant seeds. We planted shade, fruit, oxygen, and tomorrow," shared a participant.

This people-led initiative fostered eco-literacy, strengthened local ownership, and empowered women as climate leaders. The impact reached beyond Sullangudi, inspiring neighboring communities with a low-cost, high-impact model for environmental restoration. Over time, these seed balls will grow into trees grounding resilience and renewal through collective will.



Responding to Climate Emergencies

The Challenge: Shifts in rainfall patterns and rising temperatures have been affecting water availability across Tamil Nadu, especially in areas that rely heavily on farming and daily wage labor. Communities have observed that periods of low rainfall can place added pressure on crops, livestock, and household livelihoods. In response, many villages are working together to find sustainable ways to manage water and adapt to changing climate conditions. Community members and organizations are collaborating to address these challenges by sharing water-saving knowledge, improving usage practices, and focusing on collective resilience. As community voices guide new solutions and support one another, the focus remains on hope, resourcefulness, and shared learning in the face of evolving circumstances.

Goonj's Response: At Goonj, preparing for disasters is a top priority integrated into our annual planning. In the wake of floods, Goonj responds swiftly with immediate relief, guided by a time-tested, need-based approach to disaster response and rehabilitation. Our model brings together a wide network of stakeholders from both urban and rural India and is rooted in a ground-up approach to disaster relief and rehabilitation. Beyond relief, we focus on long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. We work closely with disaster-affected communities, engaging them as equal stakeholders in rebuilding their lives. Together, we repair and restore damaged infrastructure like homes, roads, bridges, schools, community centres, and water bodies ensuring that recovery is both dignified and sustainable. Over the past ten years, 70,000+ families reached with need based kits who were affected by COVID, floods, cyclones and fires.

Restoring Dignity After the Storm: Sathukkudal Keelpathi, Tamil Nadu

In Sathukkudal Keelpathi, a small village in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, Cyclone Fenghal brought devastating floods, submerging homes and displacing over 150 families and most of them were daily wage workers. With roads cut off and no way to return to work, people took shelter in makeshift camps, surviving on depleting essentials. Goonj stepped in not just with relief, but with dignity through carefully curated Rahat Kits filled with essentials like rice, dal, blankets, sanitary pads, and clean clothing. More than aid, these were acts of solidarity enabling families to hold on during a critical 10-day window until they could begin to rebuild.

This story from the ground isn't just about what was given, but how with empathy, urgency, and community voice at the center, in every disaster, restoring dignity is as important as providing relief.



Enabling Dignified Livelihood

Transforming surplus material into a development currency with Goonj's Chennai Center of Circularity (GCOC)

Goonj GCOC's in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India are the first stop where all the urban material contributed by urban masses comes. It's here that the detailed work of carefully sorting and carefully curating and matching of this material happens with diverse material needs of their rural counterparts, to ensure their dignity and respect. The good quality material goes into making Family Kits, school kits, menstrual wellbeing kits and many other kinds of Kits are customized to address the material scarcity that rural communities face in their day-to-day life.

The not wearable/ usable kind of material is turned into products like cloth quilts, school bags, sanitary pads and other essentials for rural needs. Also when Goonj sources the surplus cloth from the local unorganised sector of second-hand cloth market, it also helps organise and streamline the supply chains and the local sector.

For the women who work at these centers, this work brings employment, economic freedom and empowerment. Two of the Tamil Nadu GCOC's are in the rural part of the state, bringing livelihood to women (considered conventionally unskilled, left out of mainstream work), in the safety and comfort of their homes.



Empowering our Akkas at the Goonj Center of Circularity



At Goonj, our vision of creating meaningful impact is deeply rooted in the people who make it possible. Among them, our Akkas hold a vital place. Having braved personal hardships and life's many challenges, they now stand as pillars of strength and transformation. We see them not just as employees, but as change-makers, learners, and leaders in their own right.

For many Akkas, working at Goonj is more than financial sustenance. It is a space of dignity, growth, and purpose, where every effort contributes meaningfully to society. Recognizing this, the Chennai team conducts thoughtfully designed sessions that nurture knowledge, confidence, and life skills — extending far beyond their work.

These sessions have covered a wide range of themes: E-Waste Management, Self-Love, Spoken English, Women's Rights and Rights at Work, Laws against Domestic Violence, Financial Literacy, Yoga, Menstrual Wellbeing, Human Rights, Awareness about Leprosy & AIDS, Water and Environment Conservation, Material Management, Mental Health & Wellbeing, and more

The impact is best reflected in their voices:

"Talking about Menstrual Health and hygiene was really helpful to firstly clear a few doubts that existed and most importantly to break the taboos and converse about it in our families."- Vimala Akka

"After the session on financial literacy I am now able to understand how and where all I can save money. It is really helpful for me and my family."- Sudha Akka

Every session touches lives in unique ways, and over time, these changes become visible in how the Akkas speak, act, and engage with the world. Their empowerment uplifts the collective spirit of our work, enriching everything we stand for.

A Strong Urban Network of Relationships

Our work on the most difficult rural development issues in Tamil Nadu is led by the common masses in the villages and to the community of Do gooders in the cities of the state. This is how Goonj makes people at both ends, equal stakeholders in improving the world.

In Tamil Nadu, people of Chennai and other cities, urban schools, colleges, corporates and other institutions, play a vital role in making our work meaningful.

One, it is this vibrant community of urban Do Gooders who motivate more people to mindfully consume and give away their surplus material for the dignity of their rural counterparts. Two, it's these citizens who help build a bridge of empathy and respect between cities and villages. We work with these urban volunteers, contributors and partners, sharing rural stories of community led action just like them. With campaigns like the pan India Joy of Giving Week celebrations many individuals, schools and colleges of Tamil Nadu also participate in mindful giving campaigns. We thus build and strengthen a hyper local community of like-minded urban people, (we call them do gooders) who are committed; not only to sustainable living with action (like holding collection camps, dropping centers, networking with corporates etc.) but also mindful giving with consistent giving of material, money, time, skills etc. This community has grown in Tamil Nadu and the rest of the country, also becoming an integral part of our strategic urban planning, action and dreaming; sensing with us and responding with us, to the escalating challenges and realities of people.

Individuals: The work of Goonj in Tamil Nadu has been made possible through the efforts of a team of dedicated volunteers coming from all walks of life: homemakers, professionals, senior citizens, school children and college-going youngsters. They hold collection camps, run volunteer Dropping Centres, share space and spend time to reach out to others, become our voice in different forums, and our link for connecting many dots.



More Than Money: One Woman's Contribution at a Chennai Collection Camp

During a recent Goonj collection camp in a Whitefield apartment in Chennai, a woman warmly called "akka" approached the team with some contributions. Curious but hesitant, she listened as the team explained various initiatives, including Green by Goonj (GBG)—our upcycled lifestyle product line made from urban surplus. Hearing this her eyes lit up with amazement. "You mean these are made from things people would throw away?" she asked. Excited, she picked a few items and offered to buy them, but when she returned, her mood shifted. Her husband had refused to give her money. Undeterred, she said, "It's okay. I couldn't buy anything, but I heard you need help loading materials. I'll do that instead." Rolling up her sleeves with a smile, she worked alongside the team, even bringing her young child to assist. Before leaving, she said, "Contribution doesn't always have to be money or things. It can also be this." Her spirit embodied the true meaning of giving. It's true money and material goods are just two of the many ways in which people contribute to Goonj's work- they give their time, wisdom, networks, space, services and so much more..

Corporates: For the past decade, our team has built strong relationships with many Indian and multinational corporates who have engaged in multiple ways with Goonj; through employee volunteering, participation in Goonj's campaigns and initiatives and implementation of projects with Goonj, on various issues.

He Picked Up the Needle Again

When a corporate volunteer team from Allius visited Goonj Chennai Center of Circularity, it had some familiar faces with warm ties to the Goonj Akkas and team. Amid the ongoing tasks, one of these volunteers lingered by the sewing station, captivated by an Akka expertly repairing clothes—transforming discarded items into something valuable. Intrigued, he shared, "It's been a while, but I used to sew professionally." Encouraged by Akka's gentle guidance, he sat at the sewing machine, threaded the needle, and began stitching. Piece by piece, his hands found their rhythm again. His colleagues gathered, smiling in surprise at this unexpected moment. What began as a routine visit became a shared experience where roles blurred, and giving turned mutual. That day, a needle wove more than fabric—it reconnected someone to their forgotten skills, care, and purpose. It highlighted Goonj's principles of volunteering, to be a space not just for giving, but more of rediscovering our strengths and joys.

Institutions: The Goonj Team engages widely with urban schools, colleges and other institutions for creating a deeper awareness and action based learning around sustainable living. Many schools and college students, now independently, mobilise and motivate their wider community networks to build better awareness of rural issues and material and monetary needs. Many gated communities and residential communities and associations also take part in our urban campaigns.

SSN College Students Spark Joy of Giving with A Book Fair with Goonj

The NSS club of SSN College turned the Joy of Giving Week into a celebration through a book fair and collection drive with Goonj. The students rallied peers, organized logistics, and curated contributions—ranging from books and clothes to essential items—for rural communities.

At the heart of the initiative was Ms. Kaythri, a teacher who inspired her students to see giving not as charity, but as a respectful exchange. "We need more teachers like her who act alongside us," shared one student, echoing the collective sentiment. Each contribution made was rewarded by the students handing over sweets as a thank-you to the contributor. Nearly 75% of the books found new homes, underscoring the power of reuse and the circular economy. The materials, lovingly packed and sorted by the students, reflected Goonj's ethos—transforming urban surplus with dignity at the center.

From students to retired professionals, homemakers to tech workers—Goonj's urban volunteers, like these students and teachers are the co-creators of impact - hosting collection drives, sorting material at our Centres, speaking up for rural issues in urban spaces, and stepping up in times of disasters. This is the real impact - of building bridges between people in the cities and underserved rural regions. Each one carries the Goonj idea forward in their own unique way, in their own networks.

Over the last 10 years (2014–2024), a vibrant community of urban volunteers have organised more than **700 awareness and collection camps** in Tamil Nadu.

Wall of Do-Gooders

This wall honours some of those who quietly yet powerfully shape a more connected, caring Tamil Nadu

Individuals: A.J. Paul, Aarti, Abdul, Aditya Verma, Akram, Anbalagan, Anil Reddy, Anisha Nichani, Anitha S, Ankur More, Aparana, Aravind Srinivasan, Aravindan, Archita Kanan, Arunima, Ashish, Ayesha, Bala, Barani Ganapathy, Bhanu, Bharath Whaj Bharathi, Bhavani, Biju Kurian, Chandra Ravisankar, Chitra, David Paul, Deepa, Dhanraj, Dinesh, Divya Vimal, Dr. Ajay Kumar, Drishya, Farah, Farah-Naz-Ara, Ganesh, Gayathri, Gomathinayakam, Hari, Hari Narayan, Hariharan Lakshminarasimhan, Harini Priya, Hemalatha, Jayarama Chandram, Jayasudha, Jency, Jhanvi R, Juanita, Karthik, Kaythry, Keerthana (Bhuvaneshwari), Keshab, Lakshmi, Lakshmi Andal Thatha, Latha, Madhini, Madhusmita Sutar, Malathy Mala, Mano, Mehul, Mohan, Sherien K, Muskan, N.Ram, Nandini, Navaneethan, Neela, Neela Gangadharan, Neelima Sajeev, Petchi, Prakash Baci, Prateeba, Preetha, Priyadarshini, R. Deenadayalan, Raghu Ram, Ram Kumar, Ramesh, Ramya, Reena, Renjith, Renuka, Renuka Mani, Richy, Ricky B, Rohan Kumar Sinha, S Baskaran, S Navin, Sahil Lumbini, Saju Padmanabhan, Sanjosh, Santosh, Sarita Lal, Sathish babu, Satish, Savitha R, Seema Suresh, Seetha Ramchandran, Shabaeri, Shankar, Sharadha, Sheikh Athallah, Sherein, Shilpi Poddar, Shirley, Shyam, Sonal, Sowmya, Sreekumar, Srikanth Sridharan, Srilakshmunan, Srinivasan, Srishti, Srivenkada, Subramani M.K., Sumita Pal, Sunita mam, Sunny, Swathilakshmi, Urmilla, Vahini, Vamsi Krishna, Vasanth kannae, Venkat, Venkataramanan S, Vidya Viswanath, Vijay, Vijayalakshmi, Vikram Talwalkar, Vinod, Vinoth Nakka

Institutions: Altius, Axis Cades Technology, Bank of America, Caterpillar India Pvt. Ltd, Citi Services India Pvt. Ltd, Cognizant Technology Solutions, DBS Bank, Deloitte, HEXaware Technologies Ltd, Holiday Inn, ICON Clinical Research Pvt. Ltd, ICON Clinical Research Pvt. Ltd, Indospace SKCL Industrial Park Pvt Ltd, Jyothi-Womens club, McKinsey Global Services Pvt Ltd, Michelin India Private Limited, Movate Technologies Pvt. Ltd, Novotel, Pfizer Healthcare India Pvt. Ltd, PMI, SEED Acadmy, Sedin Technologies, SRM, SSN, Sundaram Finance, Saranya Unity enclave, TCS, The Alt School, Vestas Technology R&D, VFS Global





Insights and Possibilities

Turning Around the Water Crisis:

Water has been a constant challenge for this region; whether as floods or drought-like conditions in many districts. It not only impacts the basics of drinking water but also other aspects of sustenance and development like agriculture, industry, education, migration, health and so much more. In the past 2 decades, Goonj's pan-India work on water has been deeply impactful, galvanizing massive community-led collective action to repair, revive and build their present water bodies like wells, ponds, rivers, lakes, etc. Based on participation and action by communities most affected by the water crisis, it's immersed in their wisdom, knowledge and efforts about their water.

We deploy the world's surplus material to mobilize, motivate and empower the most resource and opportunities starved communities, to take action. This has not only created a win-win connection between the water crisis and the growing urban waste crisis but it has also unlocked the vast pool of unused household material in a trash-based parallel economy.

Surplus Cloth-Based Rural Employment and Development

In rural Karnataka and across many parts of India, Goonj facilitates community led projects to construct roads, bridges, water bodies, and other infrastructure. This strengthens local assets and sustains communities over time. Our approach centres on building upon the existing capacities, resources, skills, and knowledge within communities, fostering pride and empowerment. Broad participation not only leverages diverse talents but also strengthens relationships. Importantly, power shifts to local actors, with Goonj acting as a facilitator—helping people recognise their own potential.

Revitalizing the Tamil Nadu's rural economy with Hyper-local Decisions and Actions:

For many years Tamil Nadu has seen regular cycles of seasonal and permanent migration. As an agriculture-intensive state, this has been creating a growing manpower gap in the villages and cities across Tamil Nadu. Revitalizing the rural economy is an approach that will yield long-term results around this issue. Goonj's pan-India work with thousands of rural communities highlights an important approach. It involves facilitating a deliberate ecosystem that nurtures indigenous, self-reliant communities while ensuring minimal external disruptions. This approach can help reduce forced rural-to-urban migration and simultaneously contribute to the conservation of rural biodiversity and natural resources.

Thus, Goonj's Tamil Nadu work offers valuable insights for the country's and Tamil Nadu State's development and circularity policy, social enterprises and civil society as well. The stories and data from this work provides important evidence, highlighting a new way that's led by the decisions, dignity, wisdom, efforts and local resources of the marginalised communities. It also highlights the immense potential of the state's surplus, as a new development currency instead of being used as a charity case.

An Invitation to Collaborate For People Led Climate Action:

Collaborate-

- Partner in long-term development initiatives and disaster response work
- Scale-up people-led community development models
- Collaborate on research and policy

Co- Create-

- Co-design CSR programs aligned with development led circularity and SDGs
- Sponsor kits for development, floods relief, learning and rural livelihood
- Replicate Goonj's grassroots innovation

Engage-

- Co-organise public contribution campaigns in schools, offices, retail spaces
- Introduce and enable volunteering and payroll campaigns in your corporate engagement
- Lead awareness and learning sessions at Goonj Centers of Circularity

A team that celebrates together ...achieves together





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GOONJ.. a voice, an effort
www.goonj.org



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