

SAFARNAMA

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About the photos on the cover page:

Marking 10 years of collection camps in Sanpada, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra. Volunteers celebrated with cake, conversations, and community spirit. Little hands joined in too, dropping a small coin into the Goonj kee Gullak with big smiles!

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AN ENLIGHTENING VOLUNTEERS' FIELD VISIT IN RURAL WEST BENGAL

On a beautiful morning, a group of volunteers set off on a over 100km journey to Patharpratima, South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, leaving behind the city's chaos of Kolkata. Each volunteer was eager to witness firsthand the impact of Goonj's work in the rural areas.

The volunteers conducted group discussions with the villagers, where local women shared their experiences and challenges. The team learned that when drinking water hand pumps dry up in summer due to extreme heat, the potable water pond created to sustainably store water comes to their rescue.

While exploring the village's study center at Bishnupur and the school at Maheshpur, the volunteers interacted with students to understand their aspirations and concerns. Teachers discussed the challenges they face and how Goonj bridges the educational gaps in a holistic way and nudges them forward.

Here are some volunteer reflections after the field visit:

Mala Maheshwari shared, "I was deeply moved by the work Goonj is doing. Their approach towards empowering women is truly inspiring. By providing them with opportunities to earn a livelihood and become self-sufficient, Goonj is strengthening lives. I saw students enthusiastically engaging with educational toys. It is heartwarming to see the spark of curiosity in their eyes."

Alpana Dewan shared, "In Maheshpur, the didis are trying to solve their problems with minimal resources, which is truly inspiring." She added a beautiful line: "By coming together, we can find solutions to any problem. Through Goonj's Journey of the Roots, we had the privilege of witnessing firsthand what true self-reliance means."

A field visit truly deepens the connection between urban volunteers and the causes that Goonj stands for. As an organisation, Goonj aims to inspire communities to solve their own problems and enable them to become self-sufficient.



COLLECTIVE COMPASSION AND MINDFUL GIVING

Today's "use-and-throw" culture is taking a heavy toll on the environment. While we read and talk about climate change all the time, we need to proactively start adopting a mindful approach to help build a "climate-resilient" world. Things that are in good shape but no longer of use to one person can find new purpose and meaning in someone else's life. This magic will only happen when individuals and communities take this mission to heart and bring it to life at the grassroots level.



Neetu recalls the poignant moment that marked the beginning of her journey with Goonj. On the evening before her first collection camp, she received a call from a gentleman in her neighborhood. His voice trembled slightly as he asked her to collect some clothes from him. Sensing some urgency in his voice, she decided to visit personally instead of asking him to come to the camp the next day.

The gentleman wished to contribute clothes that had belonged to his 12–13-year-old son, who had recently passed away. This was not just a material resource; it represented grief, healing, and the quiet hope that the personal belongings could still be used by others. That single act became a moving force for Neetu and also for the initiative she was to undertake.

Since then, Neetu has been leading regular Collection Camps at SPS Residency. Our volunteers, Neetu Sharma and Smita Garg, have sparked a wave of change in their residential society, SPS Residency, in Indrapuram, Ghaziabad. Their community-driven initiative today is a model of mindful giving and collective compassion.

THE POWER OF YOUNG MINDS

At Goonj, each volunteer-driven camp plays a vital role in gathering resources for development in rural communities. With material, monetary contributions are equally essential to support the work of Goonj. When the younger generation gets involved, it is like a shot in the arm for the initiatives. The enthusiasm is unlimited. Curious young minds, and their unstoppable imagination, help to think out-of-the-box solutions, which sail across many boundaries.

This was well- showcase at a camp at Aparna Sarovar in Hyderabad, Telangana. The pre-teen volunteers got together and made fresh juices to raise funds for Goonj. The camp and their juice stand was a great success. The young volunteers beautifully played their role, spreading awareness about the importance of mindful giving. Lemonade stands, cookie counters, were a huge success amongst the contributors.

This story reminds us that change does not need to be sparked by grand gestures. It often starts with a quiet moment of empathy.





MADHU AUNTY: THE SOUL OF SEVA IN RISHIKESH

At 75, Madhu Garg, lovingly known as Madhu Aunty, radiates the warmth of someone who feels like family. Having been a part of Goonj for 12 years now, she is an integral part of the organisation that helped gain ground in Uttarakhand. She has organised and attended over 200 collection camps, showing up at every single Chaupal since 2014, building a tight-knit community of more than 15 volunteers in Rishikesh, and running a dropping center that is as lively as she is.

One of her most impactful initiatives is that of the Katran Drive, which originated in Rishikesh. She noticed a pile of scraps of clothes outside tailor shops and persuaded them to save these scraps instead of throwing them. Every week, she collects these scraps herself which are then used to transform them into sujni quilts, asanas (floor mats) and other upcycled 'Green by Goonj' products. The motive behind this initiative is that nothing should go to waste.

Behind her tireless work is a story of resilience. After the loss of her husband, Madhu Aunty found a new purpose in Goonj. Though already active in child development and women's healthcare, her involvement deepened as she channeled her grief into service. She found a new purpose in life. "I want to be with Goonj till my last breath," she says and lives those words every day, always looking for ways to do more.

She is always involved in looking for nuanced ways to take Goonj's work forward and keep expanding and innovating new ways to give back to the community. Her contributions have been recognised with several awards, including the Nari Shakti Samman by Amar Ujala and the SM Shakti Foundation. But she prefers talking about her next camp and upcoming camps, over her accolades.



BAND IT UP FOR CHANGE

Before becoming a volunteer himself, Ashok Garg from North Delhi's Pitampura used to contribute to Goonj's collection camps organised by others. This was till he decided to be a changemaker shouldering the responsibility for organising camps very actively himself!

A unique thing about Ashok's camps is that he arranges a music band during the collection drive which not only attracts people but also makes the whole collection an engaging fun activity. He also takes care of the contributors coming to the camps by offering them water and other light refreshments like tea, etc.

Ashok has been actively involved in social service since the age of 18. For a long time, he felt he was not able to contribute enough but after connecting with Goonj, he has found a sound platform for spreading happiness and awareness. What keeps him going is the encouragement he receives from others. It motivates him to keep working hard for the good of the society.



Such was her zeal that she even picked up a broom herself to clean the streets. Alka organised Goonj Collection Camps across Goa, often covering the transportation charges herself or through funding by her friends and local communities.



WHEN AGE IS JUST A NUMBER

Alka Damle from Goa is currently 73. She always had the desire to give back to society but her age held her back from starting something new. She first heard about Goonj during a session by Goonj Founder, Anshu Gupta, in Delhi in 2007.

After shifting to Goa, Alka started working with Goonj around 2010, when she was about 61. She began arranging cultural events, clean-up drives and collection camps.

Alka's contribution was not limited to camps, she also organised 3-4 sessions of Anshu Sir in Goa, including one at a college in Vasco. She expressed deep appreciation for Goonj, especially for Anshu ji, saying: "I have faith in him; he is doing very well for society."

After COVID-19, Alka limited her efforts to South Goa. Limited storage space in the godown of her current partner (the owner of a well-known shop in Goa who helps her store collected material) and difficulty in managing truck-loading became two limiting factors for her. She faces a shortage of local volunteers in Goa.

This latter problem was solved by requesting volunteer support from Goonj. Thankfully, volunteers now come a day before the loading to assist Alka. As for the issue of storage, she has expressed the following wish: "It will be great if Goonj opens its centre in Goa."

FROM HOMEMAKER TO CHANGEMAKER

Seema Adlakha's journey is anything but ordinary. Despite being a gold medalist with an MA and a B.Ed., she was unable to pursue a career due to family constraints. This did not dim her desire to make a difference to the world though. After years spent as a housewife, a yoga class became her turning point. At Yog Vigyan Sansthan, she rediscovered herself and her purpose. Through her circle there, she learnt about Goonj and what began as personal growth turned into a mission to give back. She began by motivating people around her to create a 'Giving Corner' in their homes - a space dedicated to things they no longer used but which could change someone else's life.



Today, Seema coordinates 8 camps, runs her own NGO with 100 women, and empowers youth to take the lead. Her message: "Start your journey with something meaningful, not just for you, but for others." From a silent corner of her home to becoming a voice of change, Seema proves that impact begins with one bold step.

Since 2018, Seema has been a force organising collection drives, running free Yoga Camps and inspiring hundreds to create a 'Giving Corner' in their homes. Even the pandemic did not stop her. She spread the word about Goonj's thoughtful Family Kits among those around her. Seema's own most touching contribution were her wedding sarees and sarees gifted to her by her sister, which were contributed by her on Goonj's 25th anniversary. "They meant a lot to me," she said. "Now, they will mean something to someone else too."



Goonj is bartering the world's surplus with rural efforts, wisdom, knowledge, and natural resources. Beyond mainstream recycling and reuse, we are turning the world's material into an added currency for development work beyond money—offering a parallel economic model. We bring you stories from the ground that show how material, as a tool, can nudge dignified development when leveraged through grassroots wisdom and community action.

Goonj's NJPC initiative in Majuli, Assam, addresses menstrual taboos through community dialogues called Chuppi Todo Baithaks. Women share personal experiences, challenge stigma, and access reusable cloth pads made from urban surplus. The project promotes dignity, health, and empowerment—transforming silence into collective strength in flood-affected, underserved communities.

Read the full story [here](#)



In Kothabanda village, Andhra Pradesh, 38 families united to build two bridges, ensuring children could safely reach school despite harsh terrain and rains. Assisted by Goonj's Cloth for Work initiative, this community-led effort symbolizes dignity, resilience, and the power of collective action in overcoming barriers to education and opportunity.

Read the full story [here](#)

After devastating floods in Chakdahwa, Bihar, over 100 villagers united to repair roads, community spaces, and markets through Goonj's Cloth for Work initiative. Their efforts restored not just infrastructure, but dignity and connection. This people-led recovery showcases resilience, collective action, and the strength of rebuilding from within after disaster.

Read the full story [here](#)





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