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**Published by:** Development Alternatives

**Compiled by:** Vyapika Kapoor

**Designed by:** Kamal Kumar



## Building Sustainable Communities - Transforming India



**Aakriti Uttam**

*Sr. Manager  
Development Alternatives*

**S**ustainable development – a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, is probably the most comprehensive and enduring articulation of the concept provided by the Brundtland Commission in 1986. This means that a sustainable society needs to ensure that all its citizens have access to basic needs and equitable opportunities to enhance their potential. This should be within the limitations of the ecosystem to provide natural resources for societal needs and the ability of nature to

absorb and recycle the by-products/pollutants and wastes generated due to human action.

Ecological health, Social well-being and Economic efficiency have long been argued as the three pillars of sustainability. A sustainable development paradigm puts both human well-being and planetary health at the development focus, with economic processes reinforcing a positive relationship among people and between people and the natural environment. The goal of which is to achieve harmony between environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and socio-political sustainability. Hence, in 2015 the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were declared as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

The Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a

"blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". Keeping this at the heart of our interventions, Development Alternatives has been working towards building sustainable communities with the support of various partners including bilaterals, multilaterals, corporations and various other organisations. One such collaboration is with HCL Foundation through their Uday and Harit programs.

HCL Uday is HCL Foundation's Urban CSR programme, essentially operational in cities where HCL has a presence. HCL Uday is tackling the challenges of urban poverty by reaching out to areas that are often faced with challenges of urbanisation and the inability of communities to be able to cope with it. It works towards equitable and sustainable development of the communities living below the poverty line in the urban area. The strategy is to uplift the most vulnerable citizen and ensure they have a fighting chance for a life of dignity and self-respect.



***Tank near Govt Primary School in Dujana after DA's Intervention***

Development Alternatives's Skills to Livelihood Programme is a perfect fit as the programme aims to target SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth by providing dignified livelihoods and income generation opportunities to school dropouts. The programme runs in Noida which caters for an average of 13.45 percent of the youth population. With increased rates of urbanisation and industrialisation, the need for skilled youth in the city has increased rapidly. But at the same time, recent reports also claim that despite the humungous opportunities there are nearly 1.5 lakhs youths who are unemployed.

There has been a mismatch between the expectations of the employees and the aspirations of the youth. Development Alternative's Skills to Livelihood Programme tries to bridge this gap by providing relevant skills in the job roles required by the industry. In the last 3 years now, DA has trained 1260 youths and has facilitated livelihood linkages for 882 of them. An increase in the workforce population will directly accelerate the economic development of the country as well as lead to economic efficiency.

As people and the planet both are

important so along with social and economic empowerment, ecological health is also vital. Human beings and nature are interdependent and interrelated components of the earth system. Unrestricted human activity has also caused increasing pollution, such as air, water and soil pollution, which significantly threatens the health and safety of human beings.

A similar situation has occurred in Gautam Buddha Nagar district a semi-urban district in Uttar Pradesh. Studies have shown that there is a decline in groundwater level by 1.5 m every year in the district due to over-extraction of water and if the current rate of extraction continues, the groundwater will start depleting at the rate of 2 meters annually. In response to this, Development Alternatives launched the Humare Talaab Humari Pehchaan campaign for the Rejuvenation of Traditional Tank Water Bodies in the Gautam Buddha District of Uttar Pradesh. The initiative aims to strengthen the natural ecosystems of these traditional water bodies and, at the same time create awareness amongst the community members to protect and conserve them.

Development Alternatives launched in collaboration with HCL Harit the green

initiative, a distinct flagship programme for Environment Action. It works towards building scalable and replicable models that are economically viable, socially acceptable, environmentally sustainable, holistic and inclusive.

The campaign by Development Alternatives has two different phases, the initiative will revive 14 such important water sources in the villages of Dadri Tehsil, Gautam Buddha Nagar district. The revival of the water bodies will not only pose benefits to the farmers directly dependent on them for irrigation but also boost the biodiversity which thrives in its ecosystem.

Through these initiatives, Development Alternatives is responding to the growth and needs of its growing population in as balanced a manner as possible. It is working to build on all three pillars of sustainable development by Promoting Environment Wellbeing through optimising the productive potential of the local natural resource base, Stimulating Economic Development by fostering the linkages towards employment that invigorate the local economy and Enabling Social Wellbeing by facilitating access to basic needs, health and promoting a culture of shared benefit in the community.

# Kaleidoscope

*Before*



*After*



*Prajapat Tank*



*Govt Primary School, Dujana*



*Tank Near Factory, Bishnoli*

# Tank Rejuvenation and Biodiversity Conservation



*Bada Talab, in Kachera Varsabad after DA's Intervention*

Urbanization has been associated with human development and progress, however it has always altered the quality and quantity of the local aquifer systems in various ways. It leads to not only concretization at a rapid rate leading to difficulty in replenishing the ground water but also over-extraction of water due to increasing settlements both of which cause a problem of water scarcity for the communities. The communities in Gautam Buddha Nagar district are also facing this issue due to expanding urbanization.

Gautam Buddha Nagar, district situated in Uttar Pradesh, is a semi-urban district; part of NCR with a total population of 16,48,115 (Census 2011) out of which maximum population belonging to the Other Backward Caste (OBC) category. The main source of living for the people of this district is agriculture. The main crops of the district are wheat, rice, sugarcane and in some areas, millet is also planted. But the farmers there are facing issues as the groundwater level is continuously declining.

Further, studies have shown that there is a decline in groundwater level by 1.5 m every year in the district due to over-extraction of water. If the current rate of extraction continues, groundwater will start depleting at the rate of 2 meters annually.

In the Dadri region of Gautam Buddha Nagar district, it has been seen that traditional water tanks have declined due to neglect, population rise, poor governance, and illegal encroachment, leading to water stress, loss of green cover, and soil degradation.

The storage area of many tanks has been converted into the agricultural field while others have been transferred into residential areas. As a result, physically these tanks have shrunk in their areas but on paper, they still exist. A large number of tanks are facing the issue of heavy siltation, resulting in reduced water-holding capacities. All the flora and fauna that thrived on tanks are greatly affected. Leaching has resulted in chemicals and other harmful substances entering into deep aquifers.

A major social challenge has also been observed where people, especially the young generation are unaware of the importance of maintaining the tank ecosystem. Neglect is attributed to these tanks being used as dumping yards.

Since water is critical for human life, crop security and agricultural development, rejuvenation of the traditional tanks have become necessary. Development Alternatives, in collaboration with HCL Foundation, has been working through initiative "Humare Talab Humari

Pehchan" for tank rejuvenation in four Villages of Dadri Tehsil, namely, Dujana, Bishnoli, Kachera Varsabad and Talabpur Hathipur.

The project followed DA's 3 A approach of Assessment, Action and Awareness.

Assessment is needed to gather the information of the location, condition of tanks and its ecosystem, knowledge of community members regarding the need and importance of tanks. This information was gathered through baseline survey, PRA activities, Geo mapping of catchment area, tank based planning.

Under action the work was done on the field after gathering the basic knowledge on tanks condition. It includes methods and technology to be used for cleaning and rejuvenating the tanks. The following activities were undertaken:

- 1. Cleaning (Uprooting of Aquatic Weeds):** A total of 27,38,605 Kgs of water hyacinth has been uprooted from 8 tanks
- 2. De-siltation:** A total of 37103.8 Cum of silt has been extracted from 8 tanks. This helped us in increasing the total water storage capacity of tanks from 1128333 Cum to 1165436 Cum
- 3. Bund Construction:** We have constructed 1686 RM of bund on 6 tanks
- 4. Bund Plantation:** A total of 503 trees have been planted of Arjun, Peepal, Sheesham and Banyan

For awareness, efforts were made to make the community of the four villages aware about the severe issue of water crisis in their region and build their attention on the degradation and mismanagement of tanks water bodies in their villages, an awareness generation programme was conducted.

## ONGOING INITIATIVES

To deliberate on the existing issue and importance of conserving these traditional water bodies, mass awareness programmes in the community was conducted. The three major activities to support this initiative were Street play, Wall painting and Paani Ki Paathshala.

After rejuvenating the tanks, it was essential to make this work go a long way. For the sustainability of the tanks three new interventions were introduced to help keep the tanks clean and healthy in future as well.

The three initiatives which were carried out:

1. **Filter tank:** Filter tanks are concrete structures made to filter the incoming grey water in the tanks. DA constructed concrete chambers filled with sand, gravel and charcoal to help in filtering the grey water naturally before entering the tanks. The clean water further decreases the water pollution level in the tanks and made it suitable for aquatic animals and can be used for other purposes as well. Filter tank has been constructed on the major inlets of the two tanks, namely, Bada Talab in Kachera Varshabad and tank near factory in Bishnoli.
2. **Silt trap:** The structure has been constructed to filter the incoming

waste water from houses to the tank. The water coming from the drains first enter into the silt trap and here the heavy particles in the waste settle down in the pit. The aquatic plants in the silt trap acts like a filter and cleans waste water before entering the tank. During the water quality analysis, the changes were evident. The TDS value that marks the level of pollution in water has decreased significantly.

3. **Floating island:** Floating island is an eco-friendly structure designed especially for the tanks to clean the tank water. In Bada talab of Kachera Varsabad this initiative has been introduced. As this was the largest tank in terms of area. The floating islands were built with environmental friendly materials such as bamboo logs, Khas grass, coconut rope and filled with Khas and aquatic plants like water lily,



tulsi, hibiscus, canna and lemon grass. These plants act as bio-filters and help in absorbing excess amount of nitrogen, phosphorus resulting in improved water quality in the tank.

Through our project, it was felt that efforts are required at the infrastructural, institutional, and social level, for rejuvenating these water bodies. The project works at all the dimensions mentioned above, thus providing an end-to-end sustainable solution that focuses on improving the health of these water bodies and also inculcating a sense of ownership among community members towards their protection and maintenance. Efforts are required for technological interventions with Panchayat, which are necessary to bring tanks into their original state; and awareness drives and capacity building campaigns are needed to enhance the understanding amongst the community members on importance and conservation of the water bodies. Development Alternatives is working with HCL to continue this work through the second phase of the project in Dadri region of Gautam Buddha Nagar district, Uttar Pradesh.

Anisha Gupta



*Structure of Filter tank in BadaTalab, KacheraVarsabad*

## Raj: Using Sustainable Alternative To Watering Crops



A farmer named Raj Singh a resident of Bishnoli village was one of the farmers who has been given water which has been dewatered from the tank near factor for his agricultural field.

Raj on his land of 2.27 Ha grows Kharif crops which include joawar and paddy and winter season crop which includes wheat. During rainy season, crops are well irrigated by rain water which becomes sufficient for crops growth.

But during winters it becomes a problem as wheat crop requires two irrigations. After harvesting of rainy season crops the land is prepared for sowing of winter crops. He says, "After sowing of wheat I have given one irrigation on crops for seed germination and after 15 days' crop

Name : Raj Singh  
 Village : Bishnoli  
 Age : 50 years  
 Highest Education : 8th standard  
 Occupation : Farming and Animal Husbandry  
 Family : Joint family with 11 members

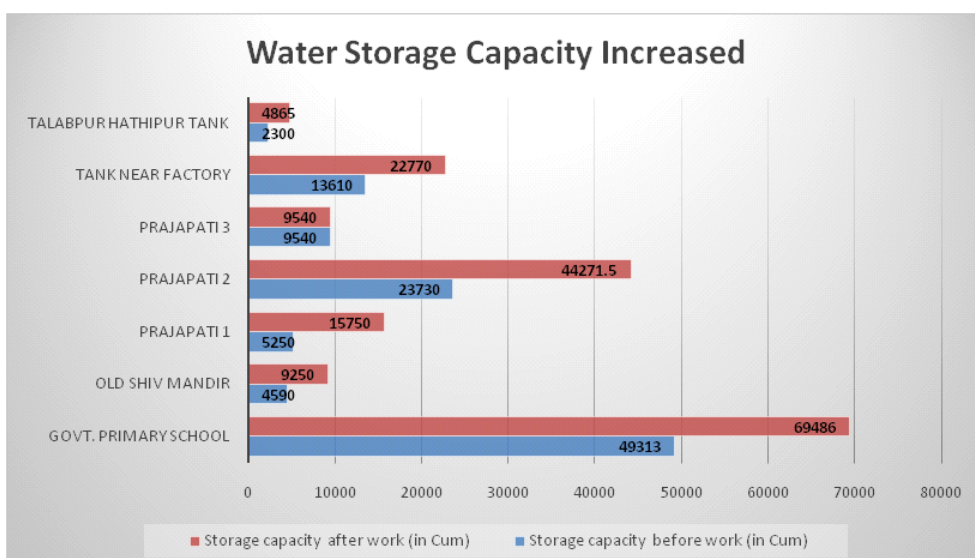
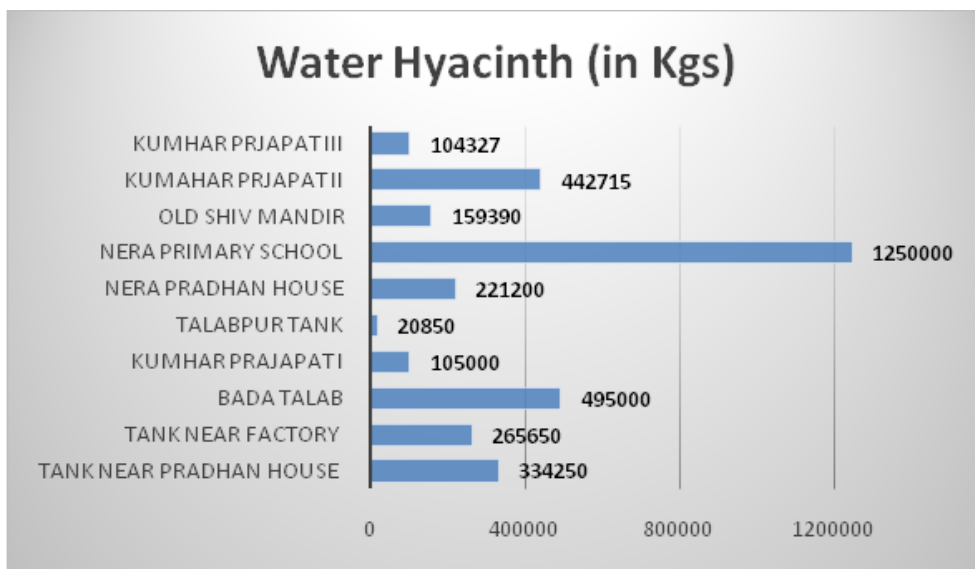
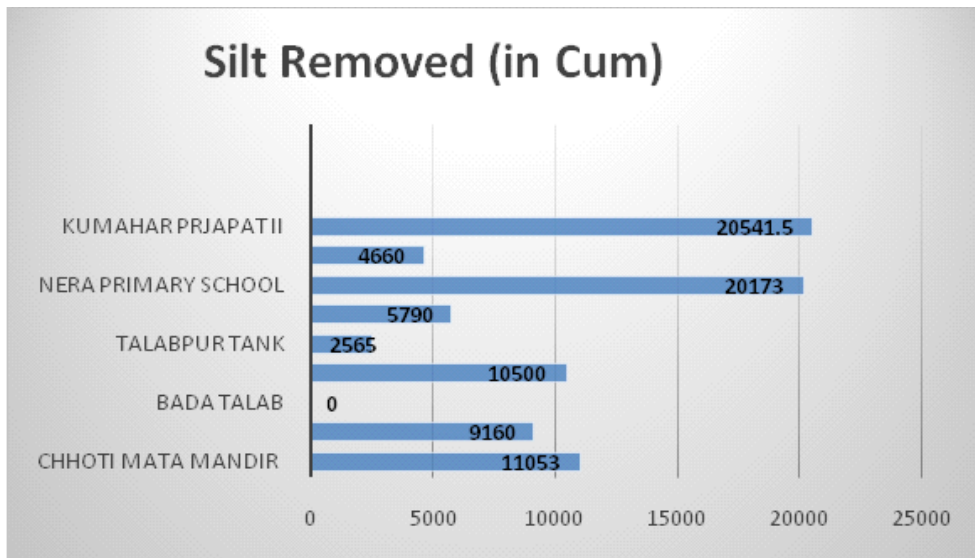
requires second irrigation but this time due to problem in tube well motor engine I was worried about the second irrigation". As we know even a single day gap in irrigating the crop field can hamper the crop growth. Luckily at that time, DA team reached him and told him about the availability of water from the tank near factory. Raj was ready to take the

dewatered water of the tank as it was given without charging any money to him.

He said that he is thankful to the DA team to help him at this crucial stage of his cropping season with water. The water from the tank not only met the water requirement of the crop but also helped in cutting down the cost for fertilizers because tank water contain animal urine as well as cow dunk which are very helpful for crop growth acting as natural nutrients to the crops. The farmer was benefitted in three ways; his whole land of 2.27 Ha was irrigated, he got 4080 Cum. dewatered water and he has saved up to 57 litres of fuel which is used in pumping water from tube wells to the field for irrigation.

Pratik Goel

# Humare Talab Humari Pehchan Impact



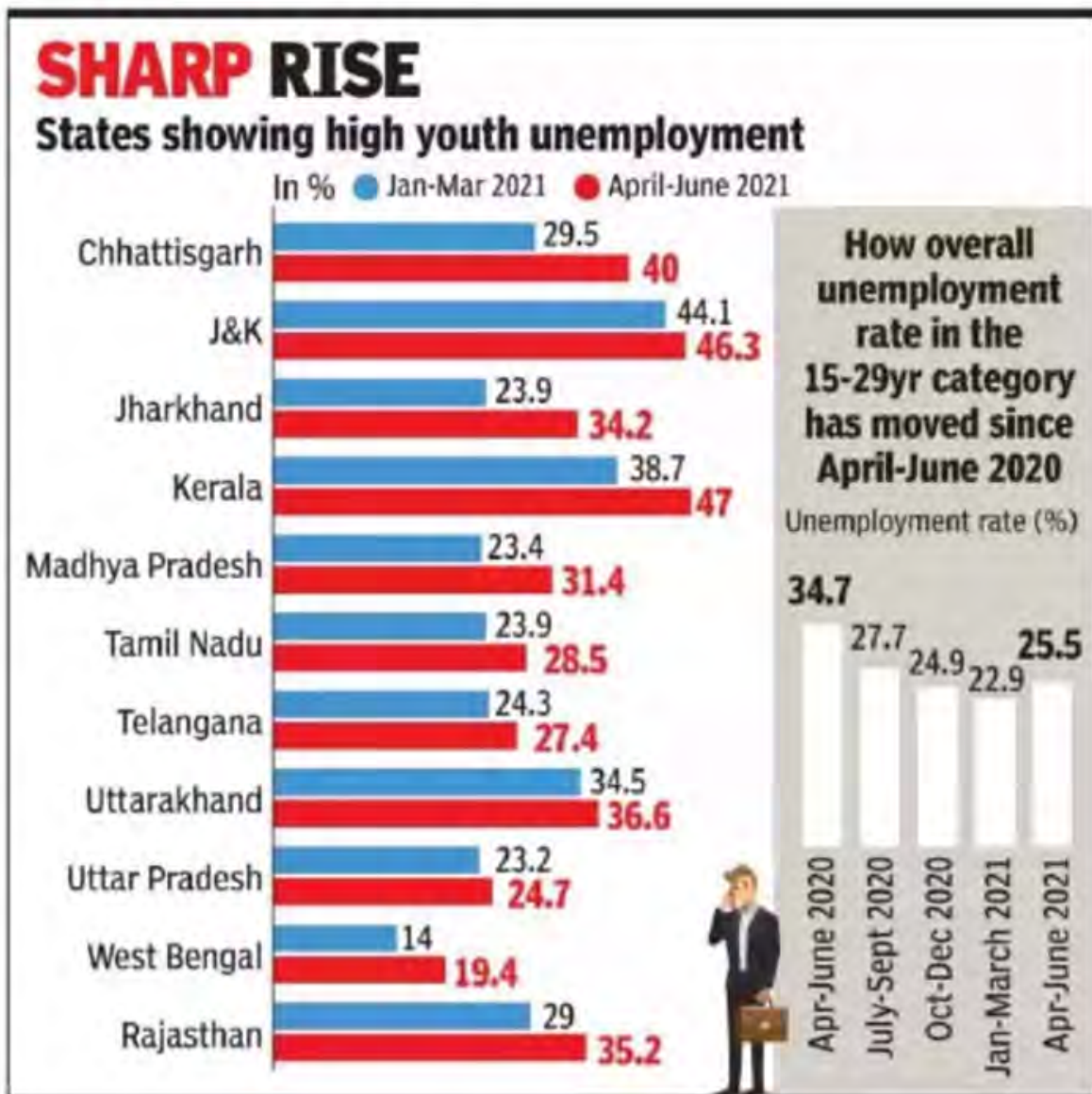
# Skilling Youth for a Better 'Future'

Unemployment, especially amongst the youth, has been a raging issue in India since 2016. Despite having a very large working-age population, and periods of marked economic growth, India has long suffered from intractable youth unemployment. This has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the aggregate

youth unemployment rate stood at 17.8% and has remained above 15% from 2017 to 2020.

Further, according to an article published in the Times of India, the youth employment rates in urban areas across India rose sharply to 25.5% in the April-June quarter of 2021 and has remained in double digits thereafter, as the second

wave of COVID-19 pandemic battered economic activities and severely impacted jobs. The article also stated that the overall unemployment rate across all ages in the country had surged to 12.6% from 9.3% and that some states such as Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, etc. witnessed high unemployment rates in double digits.



TOI article <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/joblessness-rate-among-youth-rose-to-26-in-q1/articleshow/90278857.cms>



## COMPLETED INITIATIVES

In Uttar Pradesh, the unemployment rate has been one of the highest in the country. Since April 2018, the unemployment rate for youth in the age group of 15-29 years has been in double digits and above the all-India rate for that age group. One of four youths in urban areas was unemployed between April 2018 and March 2021. An analysis of the shortfall indicates lack of skills, lack of proper counselling and unawareness of career opportunities as the chief reasons for unemployment.

Hence, Development Alternatives (DA), in association with HCL Foundation is working to provide dignified sustainable livelihood and income generation opportunities for school drop-outs and unemployed women and youth through its renowned 'Skills to Livelihood' programme. The program is meant to serve youth, women, school students, and existing trainers for entrepreneurship, capacity building, and vocational training sessions among others; through these initiatives, the aim was to achieve economic development and betterment of the community.

The programme has been running with the support of HCL for three phases now, for over three years, and the project has benefitted more than twelve hundred individuals. In the last phase, with chief target audience based in Noida the programme provided training to youth in

professional courses such as IT/BPO; Banking, Finance and Insurance Sector (BFSI) and Sewing Machine Operator.

During this phase, the team catered to the changes in the demands of the employment market by introducing new activities. The trainings were being conducted online to accustom the trainees to the digital world. Additionally, there was the introduction of multiple new events and activities conducted in a hybrid mode such as Alumni Meets, Job fairs, Placement drives, etc. To give the trainees real-time experience in the employment sectors, under this project two industrial visits were carried out. Additionally, via the six placement drives and one job fair, the team successfully placed 240 individuals of the 303 individuals trained, in big companies like Tata Croma, 3i world, Excitel Broadband, Spectrum Talent Management, Qness Corp, and Rapinfosystem.

To ensure the sustainability of the project, the DA team organised 5 Alumni meets with the aim to create an Alumni E-network. The network would bring together trainees from all the past phases of the project over platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. The members of the group are encouraged to share not only their experiences but also any vacancies or job opportunities they come across thereby helping create a wide pool of opportunities for everyone. Moreover,

the network will provide the trainees with a platform to enquire about concerns related to work culture, workload, salaries, etc.

The programme has contributed to catalysing a transformation in the lives of youth who were trained. The investment made through the programme intervention gave economic returns and boosted the confidence of the youth. A big change was observed in the lives of girls in these communities who were earlier unable to move out of their houses. Equipped with new skills, they were confident in taking on new opportunities to gain financial independence and economic security. Furthermore, this skill development initiative has helped not only girls but the youth in earning respect in society and among their families. The efforts made in this programme were a learning experience and helped in charting new pathways to work with and impact the youth.

DA understands that more initiatives such as this one are required to improve the future for the coming generation. It helps enhance the all-around expertise of the youth so that they can work more effectively and efficiently to achieve success. Skilling the youth also helps them build confidence and hope for a 'better and brighter' future.

Ekta Kashyap



*Women showcasing their product after Enterprise Development Training*

# Making Dreams Come True



*Retail Associate Training under progress*



**H**ariom's family found it difficult to manage their expenses as they had a single breadwinner in the family. The financial situation at home had become so dire that Hariom was convinced he needed to find a job. He wanted to contribute to the household income and share his father's burden, so he began venturing for jobs. It was then that he realised the gap in his skill set. This lack of skills was hindering him from attaining any offer. His friend told him about the Yuvakendra Centre that offered

short term trainings and he was immediately interested. He was keen to take up the Retail Trainee Associate course, which will help him take up the job in the marketing and sales department. During the demonstration class he observed a stark difference in the teaching methods compared to the other private institutes. "The atmosphere made me feel comfortable at once. I also felt that the teaching methods enabled participation and interaction between students, the trainer and the centre both helped me make my decision"; and he decided to enrol in this course.

The trainings helped him enhance his skills and understand his potential as an individual. Hariom felt that the Yuvakendra trainers enable students to learn more and grow more, which proves to be beneficial in the long term. The classes happened everyday and the trainings covered aspects of retail including marketing, how to manage a shop, customer relations and management along with communication skills. When Hariom joined the course, COVID was at its peak. The government had imposed restrictions on movement hence the trainings were conducted online, through Zoom. Hariom found

this to be an unnerving task initially nevertheless, with time he got comfortable with the online sessions owing to the support of his trainers. During the classes, the trainers provided him support and guidance and always encouraged him to clear all his doubts.

Hariom witnessed a marked improvement in his communication skills on account of the mock tests that were held as part of the training. "I was unable to speak without stuttering and used to fumble for words at times. The training helped me in overcoming these hurdles. Activities were engaging and helped me overcome any hesitation I may have. The trainers were very supportive and did not punish the student. The Life skills trainings have taught me so many things but whatever has been bestowed from HCL Uday and DA is priceless. I would like to manifest my heartfelt gratitude to HCL and the center team members."

After the completion of the training, Hariom sat for interviews, finally getting selected as a Sales Executive for Indian Oil Corporation Limited. Earning INR 12500 along with PF, tips and other incentives, Hariom is extremely happy to be able to share the burden of his father. Though the job requires him to be on his toes, Hariom is motivated to continue learning and growing as a result of the what he had learnt at the Yuvakendra Centre. "I was very lucky to get a well-paid job during these tough times. I will keep studying and complete my graduation along with my job". Hariom states how his father got so emotional when he realized that his son had attained a job. He says, "My father was moved to tears when I got this job. This job meant peace of mind and body for my father, as he had been looking after us all his life. Finally, I can share some of the burden he has been carrying all his life and I was elated to do that".

**Ekta Kashyap**



*Mobilisation*



*Counselling*



*Placement Support*



*Pre Placement Assistant*



*Certification*



*Training*



## IMPACT SINCE 2018

Youth Trained

1,260

People Linked to Livelihoods

835

Monthly Income Added to Economy

42,42,649

# About Development Alternatives

Development Alternatives (DA) is a premier social enterprise with a global presence in the fields of green economic development, social empowerment and environmental management. It is credited with numerous innovations in clean technology and delivery systems that help create sustainable livelihoods in the developing world. DA focuses on empowering communities through strengthening people's institutions and facilitating their access to basic needs; enabling economic opportunities through skill development for green jobs and enterprise creation; and promoting low carbon pathways for development through natural resource management models and clean technology solutions.

[www.devalt.org](http://www.devalt.org)

## Major Partners in this Journey