

ALUMNI STORIES

PART V

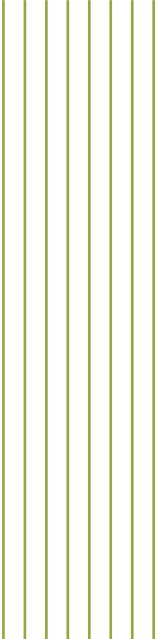




Vision

Education for Social Change

To contribute to the realisation of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society.





Follow Our Change Makers!

Stories of alumni at work

Part V



June 2021

Dear Readers,

We are happy to continue this series where students follow our change makers, alumni of the University, to understand and report on the path breaking work they are engaged in towards social change. With the pandemic on and very little break time, it was wonderful to have the second-year students this time step up and agree to do 2-3 stories of alumni online. What this meant for us is greater coverage, we broke the shackles of geography and no longer was vacation time and location a constraint for our student reporters. 30 volunteers from the second-year M.A. Education, M.A. Development, and M.A. Public Policy and Governance programmes from the Class of 2019-21 interviewed 60 alumni online.

This project that we embarked upon in 2017 has evolved beyond the story. Interactions with Alumni to understand their contribution to the University's vision of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society, help our students visualize their future careers and contextualize their education at the University. For the alumni, this is a great opportunity to stay connected and get a first-hand account of what's happening at the University. From all accounts, students and alumni both enjoy this interaction. Thanking the enthusiastic team of student volunteers, for fitting this into their already full schedules and taking care to compile these stories so carefully. And to our Alumni out there, stay connected and thank you for sharing, your stories do us proud.

We have moved to our new campus and we at the Alumni Office hope to facilitate many more such connects in the future on campus and online.

Warm regards,

Padma Nayar

Alumni Office, Azim Premji University

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Prashanta Kumar Dhal

M.A. Development, 2011-13

Teachers Driving Change

“Teachers play an important role in children’s development and any programme designed for them is effective only when the teachers can see the change and can make an impact in the classroom.”

Prashanta Kumar Dhal works at the Azim Premji Foundation where he facilitates workshops for government and private school teachers. These workshops focus on capacity building, developing teaching-learning modules and launching pilot projects to remodel teaching methods in their classrooms. His job entails visiting schools to observe how teachers engage with students and assisting them in figuring out solutions to challenges faced in the classroom. Initially, he found it difficult to manage his schedule with the government teachers but gradually as he spent more time working with them it became better.

Prashanta’s experience of working closely with teachers has helped him empathize and develop a great partnership with them. This has taken time and effort in building, understanding their workspace a bit better. His experience has taught him that crucial learning



happens on the field. This has improved his communication skills, which is pertinent when working in the grassroots. He feels that the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University has been a stepping stone for his career in the development sector.

Prashanta reflects, “Education and development have a symbiotic relationship, so any initiative or programme needs to bridge the gap between the two and then start.”

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Rohit Gangadhar Satkar

M.A. Development, 2015-17

Empowering and Enabling Farmers

“If a person truly wants to achieve something, they have the ability to achieve it.”

Rohit works as a Market Development Manager for Flow Catalyst Technology Pvt.Ltd. which builds digital platforms for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). He is working on the technology to build an online trading platform for FPOs which will have a large database of buyers at the national level with a transparent pricing system for farmers.

The farmer suicides in Maharashtra motivated him to plunge into a career in the agriculture sector, aiming to bring the warranting community of farmers who are out of reach into the mainstream.

Rohit worked in Madhya Pradesh for four years as a Supply Chain Specialist and Chief Executive Officer in FPOs. He developed small enterprises at the community level. This was challenging work as he had to break the well-established stakeholders and involve the farmer producer company (FPC) in the value chain. This was done



to enable FPCs to make a good profit and be self-sustainable on the model of the Dairy farmer producer company. Rohit’s interest in agriculture led him to start a contract farming venture with his friend in his native village for the cultivation of watermelons. Though there have been initial hiccups, Rohit dreams to take this venture forward.

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Kapil Rawat

M.A. Development, 2011-13

Seeking Nutritional Security for Communities

“Keep on exploring till you find satisfaction in work. Devote yourself unconditionally for the community.”

Kapil Rawat works independently on alternate agriculture and zero budget farming in his village, in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand. Over the years, Kapil has been engaged in a variety of interventions with his village community like greenhouses, trout fishing and tourism. He is the first farmer to have been successful in trout fishing in his district and was recently awarded the best farmer in Bhatwari block from the Agriculture Department.

Kapil shares that Azim Premji University gave him the confidence and most importantly, the platform to explore and experiment new avenues. On completing the M.A. Development programme, he joined the Azim Premji Foundation at Uttarkashi but left his job to do an independent research on need analysis of Apple farming in Himachal Pradesh as he was determined to work for the people of his community in the field of livelihood and alternate agriculture.



Determined to work for the people of his Garhwali community, he has devoted the last five to six years in the field of livelihood and alternate agriculture, making him happy and satisfied. Kapil plans to work on sustainable agriculture and vegetable growing for improving the nutritional security in his community. He believes that learning by doing is the best way to succeed in life and that one should never be disheartened with failure.

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Deepika R

M.A. Education, 2016-18

Imparting Impactful Education

“You must find your team, people whom you can work with and who share your joy, grief, and values, who will help you achieve your potential. People who will help you stay focused and committed. People who will help you retain hope in the struggle for justice and equality.”

Deepika is a Curriculum Specialist at Madhi Foundation, Chennai. Madhi engages with the government schools of Tamil Nadu to improve the foundational literacy and numeracy skills of children in early grades. She works in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu state authorities in designing primary grade classroom content for English and Maths, along a curricular framework.

Deepika takes special care that the curriculum encourages critical thinking, is discrimination-free, child-focused and most importantly enables them to connect with their surroundings. Her work is crucial because the curriculum must be thoughtfully designed and implemented to impart impactful education to children.

Deepika shares that the learnings and the freedom to experiment at Azim Premji University were vastly different from the philosophies of the organizations that she has worked with in the past, and



that it was a challenge to accept and adapt to it. Her belief is that an organization’s philosophy can be limiting and collaboration with people from different walks of life can provide scope for experimentation. Her experience so far has made her deeply reflective and conscious about her personal life and work . She envisions a future where she can create flexible and relatable content that offers every child the opportunity to learn effectively and achieve their best potential.

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Kalpana Aravamuthu

M.A. Education, 2011-13

Viewing Education with a Unique Lens

“I believe in staying light when working, and doing my part, and not worrying about immediate results.”

Kalpana is an independent consultant, working to build capacity in organisations. Her other interests are in teaching English (schools, community centers, corporate), and in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), education and careers. She enjoys working with young adults, and helping them to build their confidence and develop a unique voice for expression.

Kalpana joined Azim Premji University after working for twenty years in the corporate sector. She enjoyed being part of a diverse classroom with classmates of all age groups not to mention a myriad of class, caste and religious backgrounds from across the country and with teachers, each of whom were an inspiration. She was keen to look for solutions to the problems that she saw around her and the M.A. Education programme helped her to look at education with a new perspective, thereby strengthening her will to use education as a tool for social development.



Kalpana gained knowledge about the aims of education, language and teaching which she draws upon while conducting her various projects related to education. She intends to make an impact while enjoying her work. Her belief is that one must work without expecting any sudden change, as change is slow.

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Kunal Kumar Sah

M.A. Development, 2011-13

Bridging the Gap in Primary Education

“We do not lack the potential for teaching or learning on the ground, but the motivation to engage must be continuously encouraged on both sides.”

Kunal is an Independent Consultant, working in the education space, engaged in teacher capacity building, conducting workshops, translating text into regional languages, content creation and documentation. These activities have helped him in building a strong network with Aangan Trust, Education Alliance, Room to Read, Sampark Foundation and various other such organisations. He chose to work independently as he wanted to spend more time with his young daughter Gublu.

The idea of working in the social sector led Kunal to Azim Premji University for the M.A. Development programme. He started his career with Pratham Education Foundation where he created teaching-learning material in mathematics, trained primary school teachers in various locations and handled the capacity building of field staff, through training and workshops. This enabled him to



understand the various challenges faced in the field of education, in a rural setting. As a consultant, he is mandated to follow the guidelines of the organizations he works with and the major challenge he faces is the limited scope to put his own views or perspectives in the clients work.

A major revelation from Kunal’s work is that the content for teachers or students can be designed with great impact only when the views of local level teachers are taken into account. Another important learning is the importance of contextualising each problem to find the best solution.

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Reju Shaju V

M.A. Development, 2012-14

Using Technology to Solve Societal Issues

“Learning is a never-ending process; it is one’s own choice to learn new things or take time to master things that he or she already knows.”

Reju works for a Hyderabad-based not-for-profit organisation that provides health, education, and livelihood services to the disadvantaged population in remote locations. His work revolves around communication, reporting and information management. While he is responsible for coordination of development interventions, social research, and training, he is currently experimenting with mobile data applications.

One of the mobile applications that Reju has developed helps disadvantaged students from Kerala grasp difficult concepts in their curriculum. He has also worked on an app for assessing airborne infection control for health facilities, tuberculosis contact tracing and referral follow-ups along with monitoring key project indicators. His skills have also been helpful in creating Management Information System (MIS) applications for data gathering and support.



Reju’s experience of working with grassroot NGOs dates back to before he did the M.A. Development programme from Azim Premji University. His time at the University exposed him to people from different walks of life, thereby enabling him to construct a fresh perspective about the development sector. After graduating, he joined the research team of Azim Premji Foundation, where he gained different experiences in the domains of health, community development, women empowerment, and Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs). Reju believes that even though the skill gap is a challenge, they can be solved by learning new skills and updating the existing skills one possesses.

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Supriya R. Menon

M.A. Development, 2011-13

Lending a Helping Hand to Changemakers

“One key learning from the University that keeps getting reinforced through my interactions at work is the recognition that linear solutions in this nonlinear world don’t really work!”

Supriya works as a Programme Manager at Wipro Foundation, which works with civil society organisations in the domains of education, ecology and community care. Her role involves enabling partner organisations of Wipro Education to deliver positive contributions towards educational improvement. The partner organisations include established organisations, community-based organisations who have made recent forays into education and nascent organisations. Vikramshila, Digantar, ArtSparks, Muskaan, Jhamtse Gatsal, i-saksham, Pararth Samiti are a few of these partner organisations, who have been provided financial support through grants and fellowship programmes, with mentorship and capacity building support on organisational and educational aspects.

Supriya has spent the last six years finding happiness in facilitating and assisting these organisations in achieving their own passion and



expertise. Having received a great opportunity to learn from partners in the development ecosystem, she has been evolving various strategies to leverage this collective learning for more effective work on the ground.

Supriya’s career began as an engineer but an interest in the social sector led her to Azim Premji University. Insightful interactions with different people from diverse backgrounds at the University has brought a paradigm shift which has helped build a unique perspective. Even amidst a lot of travelling as part of her role, the journey so far has been a great learning experience for her!

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Arul Mozhi Varman

M.A. Development, 2013-15

From Development to Coding and Data Analysis

“Risk and rewards are always hidden deep; insights can be drawn only by looking forward into the future not by looking backwards.”

Arul works as an Independent Financial Analyst and advises clients on portfolio management. His career began as a Civil Engineer specializing in habitat development, working for an infrastructure company for a few years. In search of a new experience, he quit his job and joined the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University. After his graduation in 2015, Arul briefly worked as a Content Writer for a start-up. Though he did enjoy that, he shifted to the financial sector as he realized his interest lay in statistics and data analysis.

Arul shares that his time at the University helped introduce him to a wide range of books and subjects. The subjects he opted for, especially State, Market and Economic Policy Reforms and the research courses at Azim Premji University helped him gain more knowledge in his area of interest. He reminisces about the lessons he



learnt on interlinkages between globalization and its effect on policy making and trading. This broader understanding of global affairs has benefited him greatly in his work. Arul's love for coding has him currently engaged in writing codes based on statistical models.

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Ishwarya Thyagarajan

M.A. Development, 2012-14

Ensuring Health Equity through Organ Donation

“My research is focussed on making organ transplants affordable, contributing to achieving health equity.”

Ishwarya is a Researcher with a specialisation in Health and Nutrition. She works for MOHAN Foundation Chennai, a not-for-profit organization that works in the field of deceased organ donation and transplantation. She currently works as a Research Associate and Counsellor within the organisation. Ishwarya counsels organ failure patients and their families along with the families of the deceased to donate organs and tissues. She shares that more than 5-lakh people in the country die every year, waiting for a life-saving organ transplant, but less than one person per million population opt to donate organs. To bridge this gap, the Foundation where she works actively engages in generating awareness on the importance of organ donation by engaging with the public, medical fraternity and the government.



Ishwarya loves to write and has presented her research in national and international conferences and has also published articles on topics related to accessibility and affordability of transplants and the barriers to organ donation. She feels the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University, especially the Research, Health and Nutrition courses helped her gain knowledge and confidence that reflects in her work today.

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Links to her published [research](#) and [articles](#).

Parveen KM

M.A. Education, 2017-19

Unlearning, Learning and Unlearning

“Being an educator, I cannot stress how important it is to reflect. It took a while for me to understand the richness of doing it each day but when I did, it made all the difference.”

Parveen works as a Teacher and Coordinator for Grade 1 at Markaz International School. With a specialization in Early Childhood Education, her responsibilities include lesson planning, assessment planning, conducting review meetings, deciding upon materials/resources and extra hands-on activities for the students. The school employs a theme-based method of pedagogy in teaching and learning wherein all subjects are taught around the theme chosen and it helps the students to draw connections between subjects.

Parveen found her way through this new form of teaching and has been developing teaching strategies and activities effectively. She feels that this ability to engage with innovative forms of teaching and learning grew from the understanding gained from the University.

The transition from the University to the workplace was initially a challenge for Parveen as she tried to put her learnings into practice.



She had to juggle between theoretical understandings, the need to use her practical knowledge and to communicate it effectively. What Parveen has gained while working is immense and she highlights the importance of good leadership in any institution and the need to maintain healthy relationships with colleagues. Going back and forth between learning and unlearning sums up her journey thus far.

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Samra Abdul Razack

M.A. Education 2014-16

Expanding the Horizons

“When the system is stuck with conventional methods, break the barrier, get in and create something new.”



Samra is an academic counsellor at Hikewise Learning, an Ed tech firm based in Calicut, run by a group of young people invested in research and academia who believe in delivering quality education to all. It supports learners of all ages to acquire their degree and upskill their career potential. For her, the learning years at Azim Premji University were followed by a process of unlearning to fit into a work environment which followed rigid conventional methods. Her ideas and a strong desire to put her learnings to practice led her to create a resource centre called ‘Cadence Institute for Excellence and Social Empowerment’ in alliance with four friends.

Cadence provides workshops, certificate programmes and other skill development sessions for college students, conducting sessions in respective colleges and universities. Some of the courses offered are ‘Feminism and its Discontents’, ‘Philosophy of Science’ and ‘Discover

Design’. The vision is to complement and support the existing education system by providing learning in subject areas which may not always be taken up in colleges and universities. These diverse topics help the students to be trained in subjects that contribute to their knowledge and skill development. The remarkable response from the students and faculty after conducting their first workshop encouraged them to continue. They witnessed changes with respect to ‘learning’ and this has made the idea more concrete that it was much needed for the benefit of society.

A major challenge for Samra is funding but she is confident that it will move forward. Samra believes that nothing can and should stop learning.

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Siddhant Jain

M.A. Public Policy and Governance, 2017-19

Amplifying the Voices of the Youth

“The ability to be part of safe spaces where an individual can observe, reflect, question, analyse, and express in their own sense, ideas and beliefs without any judgment is an unnoticed privilege.”

Siddhant works as a Monitoring and Evaluation Associate at Slam Out Loud, an organisation based in New Delhi that uses arts to empower children and young adults. His role requires him to design rubrics and evaluation mechanisms to check and verify the performance of various developmental programmes of the organization. He uses tools like in-depth qualitative interviews and case studies for impact assessments to analyse the workings of programmes. Siddhant faces the challenge of the lack of well researched low-tech tools to measure socio emotional skills in developing countries and finding cost effective resources for programme evaluation. His work enables other organizations to evaluate their own developmental programmes and it has had a positive impact on the children they work to uplift.



Slam Out Loud has an integral role in aiding multiple children between ten and seventeen years of age and amplifying their voices. Some of these children have become TED speakers, eloquent debaters, often speaking with crowds of thousands and have gained a lot of prominence and recognition.

Siddhant realises that the reluctance of educational institutions and students to give importance to arts as a tool for development of expression requires a systemic change through streamlined efforts. He says that the M.A. Public Policy and Governance programme being very human centric has accorded him with a sense of professionalism and dexterity.

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Amrita C

M.A. Public Policy and Governance, 2015-17

At the Intersection of Law, Public Policy and Governance

“On paper it looks simple, but when we do an in-depth study, looking at the people and their history, you see the complications arising. This is where our academics and on-field exposure come together, and we critically analyse the situations to come up with meaningful solutions.”

Amrita works as a Research Associate with the Azim Premji Foundation. She is currently working on the Forest Rights Act and its implementation in Kerala. Working on this research project helped her interconnect her core learnings of law, policy, and governance. She feels that attention must be given to strengthen outcome-oriented monitoring and evaluation methods to see the actual change on ground.

Amrita started her career as a lawyer, but she felt a crucial link was missing in her role and wanted to understand ground realities. This made her join the M.A. Public Policy and Governance programme at Azim Premji University. The University helped Amrita develop various perspectives through continuous evaluation, critical analysis, and skill building. As Amrita says “Without a proper theoretical base, one can’t do a good action-oriented project. A solid base in theory is very



important. Azim Premji University provided that right mix of theory and practice and that was the biggest plus point.”

Amrita has worked as a researcher at the Institute of Management in Government, Thiruvananthapuram on two projects, working on the implementation of Right to Information Act and the departmental efficiency of ten government departments that were closest to the people. She endeavours to continue with research in the intersection of law, policy and governance and hopes to pursue a PhD in future.

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Mathew T John

M.A. Development, 2016-18

Drawing a Fine Balance

“Students are adults and they need their freedom to make choices and think independently. I’m trying to break that bubble of authoritarian teacher student relationships, and for me, the biggest support are my colleagues who are like minded and encourage me.”

Mathew John is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Marian College (Autonomous) in Kuttikaanam, Kerala. He teaches Sociology, Environment and Development Communication. Influenced by the teaching methods he experienced at Azim Premji University, Mathew uses short stories, newspaper articles, theatre and various other activities as a part of his teaching style. He learns a lot from the students every day as his classes often have open discussion sessions. The students enjoy it thoroughly. “It is difficult to open subjects like caste and privilege to students who believe it is only prevalent in remote villages of Northern India. But I wanted them to introspect for themselves about their privileges and the very existence of caste in the class. It is difficult, but that is how you start,” he says. Mathew also handles some of the administrative work assigned by the management.



It has been a fulfilling experience for Mathew from planning to quit the M.A. Development programme initially to growing fond of the programme by building bonds with the faculty, the student community and the Music Club which is his brainchild, at Azim Premji University. He continues to pursue his passion in music. “Being with students and holding discussions and learning from them encourages me to continue teaching. That also happens to be the profession that’s running my music dreams as well. I’ll have to figure out a way to manage both,” laughs Mathew.

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Radhakanta Meher

M.A. Education, 2017-19

Transforming Leadership in Alternative Education

“My work is all about helping people set their objectives whether they are teachers, students, or parents, so that they perform best in their respective areas.”

Radhakanta works as the Principal of Chirag School, an alternative hindi medium school for children from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, located in the remote areas of Uttarakhand. His role involves facilitating the development of a standardized curriculum along with observing, evaluating, and supervising the instructional programme to ensure quality education in the school. It also includes him leading in the formulation and planning for the infrastructure and overall improvement of the school.

Chirag School’s educational model is setting an example for 72 schools in the area. His learning being the head has been immensely enriched from working at various levels with challenging context and a diverse community of colleagues. Raising funds for the school is a challenge for Radhakanta, as it is proving difficult to convince people and funding organisations about the school’s aim to provide quality education to every child.



Radhakanta joined the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University after working for eight years in the field of education, with an aspiration to widen his perspective and extend the understanding of education beyond teaching. The ‘Teacher Professional Development’ course at the University strengthened Radhakanta’s capacity to structure, plan, and execute professional development programmes for teachers and helped in developing his leadership equally.

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Ridhima Garg

M.A. Education, 2016-18

Providing Quality Education for Every Child

“I find that teaching requires knowing myself and the child for who she is, as much as knowing the discipline I teach and the educational theory which guides my practice.”

Ridhima is a Fellow at Teach for India, teaching in a government school in Delhi. She also works part-time at Digantar, a school for rural children where she is a part of TARU (The Academic Resource Unit). She plans, designs, and conducts teacher training workshops and Foundations of Education courses offered by Digantar. This role, even though part-time, helped her understand the challenges of planning, designing, and conducting such workshops which emphasizes the aims of education for teaching every subject. Her role is academic, practical as well as administrative in nature.

Ridhima reflects that learnings at the University were consolidated and extremely challenging in some ways. Her experience at Digantar has deepened her understanding of school curriculum and pedagogy but putting it across for teachers and teacher educators who are immersed in their own rhythm and contextual complexities proves difficult.



According to Ridhima, educational theory has helped her understand how the aims of education can come alive in the classroom. She shares that the social standing of children greatly influences their learning and development. She endeavours to study further to obtain a better understanding of the educational space and practice. While teaching children challenges her, it also brings energy and joy to keep learning every day.

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Kirti Krishna Ratnoo

M.A. Education, 2016-18

Novel Approaches to Language Development and Learning

“I feel it is important to learn and unlearn things. This openness allows me to strike a balance between past experiences and new experiments. So, whenever we discuss ideas, the first thing I say usually is “Let’s give it a try.”

Kirti teaches Hindi as a third language at the Bangalore Steiner School to students from grade 1-8. Following the Waldorf method which includes storytelling, songs, and drama, she weaves her own knowledge and experiences into her pedagogy. She uses form drawing as well as hand work as a tool for language building which are important elements of teaching and learning at the school.

Kirti has also been helping the school to find out ways of accommodating the IGCE curriculum without losing the spirit of the school’s approach towards teaching and learning. One of her biggest contributions to the school is being able to bring a change in the language development of students as they can recognize, comprehend, and understand the concepts faster through her approaches. This was recognised by the school and her ideas and practices are now being blended with the current approach at the school. Kirti has adapted to the requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic by focussing on listening and speaking skills during



online sessions and guiding students to work on reading and writing in their free time at home.

Kirti’s exposure and experimentation of teaching-learning materials, their effectiveness as well as different language approaches began during her time at Azim Premji Foundation. She has overcome many challenges in leaving her hometown to pursue an M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University and follow a career of her choice.

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Mukesh Kumar

M.A. Education, 2017-19

Changing Mindsets, Empowering Teachers

“We all have knowledge and we need to believe in continuous learning.”

Mukesh is a Programme Officer at the Kapadwanj Kelavani Mandal, in Kheda, Gujarat, where he has been working since 2019. His role involves working on content, curriculum, early childhood care and education, language, and assessment for pre-primary up to grade 3 in schools.

Mukesh is currently working on a project in collaboration with the Agastya International Foundation to make hands-on science and art education programmes accessible for students in schools and villages in remote areas. Along with his team, he trains volunteers to bridge the gap between classroom theories and practical learning. This programme has become hugely popular among both the students and teachers. Going one step further, Mukesh has learnt Gujarati, supporting teachers in creating and designing their own lesson plans and assessments. This has enabled them to support children with special needs and design remedial education



programmes which has in turn led to an improvement in learning outcomes in students. He actively participates in creating school improvement and development plans which take care of building infrastructural facilities and developing as well as enhancing the skill sets of the children by conducting interesting events for them.

Mukesh is motivated by his personal journey and his learnings from the M.A Education programme at Azim Premji University where he met many inspiring people. His work has helped him grow personally and professionally and he hopes to empower as many children of migrant workers as he can, becoming a role model for his community.

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Ashishkumar Dagadu Suryawanshi

M.A. Development, 2012-14

Transforming Organisations and Communities

“Change is a very slow process; it takes time but after five years when I see the organisation and the communities moving from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach, it looks like an achievement.”



Ashish works with the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wing of Coal India Ltd. - a public sector organisation, in Jamuna village in the Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh. He has spent the last five years working with the tribal community on various projects like deeping ponds, ensuring safe drinking water, improving school infrastructure, constructing a model anganwadi centre and other health facilities. Along with that, he also provides skills training for local youth, motivating them to become self-employed and conducts workshops on human-elephant conflicts.

Ashish's efforts got digital classrooms and computers for the first time in the village government school, where he also teaches tribal children in his free time. His perseverance has brought about a transformation within the organisation as well as in the mindset of the tribal community.

Ashish came from a health domain to pursue M.A. Development at Azim Premji University which helped him gain perspective and has made his journey more fruitful. Deciding to act on the acute shortage of water in his hometown in Maharashtra, along with his school friends, Ashish started Jaldoot Foundation. They work towards rejuvenating ponds, deepening of canals and are also building awareness among the villagers on the importance of water conservation, environmental protection, and plantation. Ashish articulates that the journey ahead is long, but he is a visionary who dreams with open eyes and utter dedication.

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Sheetal Paul

M.A. Education, 2011-13

Teachers are the Best Authors

“Every teacher should have the knowledge and skill of creating comprehensive, contextual and critical text for their learners”

Sheetal Paul is a storyteller who works with children’s Literature. “Teachers are the best authors” reads a poster on the Teacher-Author programme - her brainchild which works in enabling students of education and government/ private school teachers teaching language in the primary grades, to create stories. The programme has completed 8 successful batches, with 80 teachers from across India and abroad and has helped create literature in Hindi, English, Gujarati, Chhattisgarhi, and Bundelkhandi languages which has been shared with students by the participating teachers. By guiding the teachers to see the relationship between language learning and knowledge construction, the process includes engaging with existing children’s literature and creating characters from within the context of the learners. Care is taken to ensure that the stories are linguistically comprehensive and critically relevant. For every new batch, the programme is modified, keeping in mind participant’s



teaching experience and understanding. The expectation is to leave participants with theoretical understanding and knowledge-gain about the nature and pedagogy of language.

Sheetal, a first batch graduate from Azim Premji University, has travelled through the field of education for more than a decade now. Her belief is that children’s literature is the best way to enable teachers to create literature for their own students.

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Abhishek Anand

M.A. Development, 2014-16

Enhancing Income for Farmers

“Demonstration leads to faster learning by the community.”

Anand is a District Consultant at MicroSave Consulting in the Northern part of Bihar. He works with a government intervention called Joint Special Purpose Vehicle for Agricultural Transformation (JSPVAT), under the Bihar Rural Livelihood Mission which helps in the development of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs).

Anand’s work includes incorporating, documenting, designing business plans of FPOs as well as training and capacity building of the farmers. He also works on the incorporation of one of the few government FPOs in the country, with a coverage of 40,000 families in the Seemanchal area of Northern Bihar. Having continuously worked towards the upliftment and well-being of farmers, Anand’s work experience includes working with Foundation for Ecological Security in Rajasthan, PRADAN and Basic Samruddhi Ltd. in Jharkhand. In his earlier project in Jharkhand, he helped farmers, especially women in promoting the farming of Grand Naine (G9)



variety of bananas, which led to increased production, fulfilment of nutritional requirements and an additional source of income for the families.

Anand reflects on the learnings of tools and techniques in the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University and says that it helped him in his work for project planning and in accessing practical implications on ground for different scenarios.

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Jafar Dhaluj Umarfarukh

M.A. Development, 2015-17

Change through Corporate Social Responsibility

“The idea of working in the social sector for social good keeps me motivated all the time to give my best.”

Jafar is a Senior Executive with the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wing of Dentsu Communications India Private Limited. He coordinates CSR projects in Maharashtra and ongoing project is on road safety which aims to reduce brutality from road accidents on expressways, highways and national highways. His project on medical health involves running a mobile health unit that provides essential medical facilities to the underprivileged and to rural parts of Maharashtra. Another one of his projects is with the elderly to reduce the idea of loneliness among them and to bring positivity and joy into their lives.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Jafar was involved with the Health Department of Maharashtra to understand the requirements of the pandemic and coordinated with corporates to invest for social causes. He facilitated procurement of new ventilators and PPE kits which were handed over to several government hospitals of



Maharashtra and feels privileged to have worked for people at the most crucial time.

Jafar shares that interactions with the professors and his peers at Azim Premji University helped him in building his perspective and the problem-solving aptitude that the University promotes has helped him cope with different situations on the ground. “I have learnt that working with human minds is the toughest task and it requires time, patience and a little bit of motivation to make a change”, says Jafar.

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Arpit Goel

M.A. Public Policy and Governance, 2017-19

Built Environment and Building Student Capacities

“My ultimate aim is to do something that benefits students - to position them as leaders and enable them to carve their own path in the development space.”

Arpit is pursuing ‘The Anant Fellowship for Built Environment’ at Anant National University in Ahmedabad, India’s first design university with a focus on building a sustainable future. The fellowship envisions building a cadre of solutionaries to take note of pressing issues around governance, cities, urbanism, design, and development of public spaces. Arpit is learning communication, design, art, and taking cultural courses as well as following technical tracks to up-skill for the industry needs. He works and studies with the best resources to come up with sustainable and equitable solutions to improve the built environment.

During the pandemic Arpit saw a need in the areas of research and writing among budding undergraduates and single-handedly led and mentored 8 interns over a period of 4 months to execute a customised internship programme for them. Identifying a gap in the demand and supply within research and writing, he customised



internships that matched skills which were proportionate to the graduate school requirements. The Policy Network was born to fill that need and is now a project running with four volunteers and Arpit wishes to continue to build this into an organisation of its own. He gets immense fulfilment when he works with interns, gets tangible output, and sees happy faces by the end of their journey.

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Gloria Benny

M.A. Development, 2017-19

Research Leading to Personal Learnings

“More than the interviews or the paper presentations, it was the personal learnings that were enriching. I got to learn first-hand from such inspiring personalities on ground.”

Gloria Benny is a public health enthusiast working as a researcher at George Institute for Global Health, New Delhi. Her current project in Wayanad is on ‘Enhancing the role of community health workers in service utilization of tribal populations’. This project is about the health systems domain, which has helped her learn about the broader problems related to short term migration for work, human trafficking, exploitation of tribal workers, alcoholism, and its different aspects.

Gloria shares that apart from the usual challenges around the various processes of research, carrying it out during a pandemic opened up possibilities for nuanced learnings of public health and community research. Due to the lockdown and subsequent remote fieldwork, her team went through lots of trial and error so as not to compromise research ethics for excellence.



Gloria has the opportunity to document the work of women leaders in public health in Kerala. Inspired and motivated from this work, she has co-authored a chapter that is yet to be published in the book ‘Women in Global Health Conference - 2019’ at Rwanda. She has earned academic credit for several paper presentations in various international conferences as well. Azim Premji University broadened her knowledge in terms of thinking capacity, building perspectives, and looking through intertwining aspects of development. Gloria wishes to continue working on ground level public health research in future.

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Shubham Shukla

M.A. Public Policy and Governance, 2016-18

Driving Change through Policy

“Governance needs to be understood at all levels. A big impact often comes with small changes that make a difference. not necessarily only those that impact the system at a larger level.”

Shubham works at Anant National University in Ahmedabad, a design-based university aimed towards building a sustainable future. He works as an Associate Officer for the Anant Fellowship, which focuses on devising solutions on complex issues in the environment domain like livelihood, heritage conservation, affordable housing etc. It also involves a classroom component and fieldwork in collaboration with grassroot level organisations, where Shubham guides the fellows as a mentor, leading them to ensure successful outcomes.

Shubham is keen on understanding issues through a policy perspective and in bringing professionalism in government services. He was instrumental in setting up the Gujarat State Youth Board to help bridge the gap between people and government, thereby furthering the first youth policy for the State. Shubham together



with his team identified mental health as an important aspect to focus on policy documents. The policy document based on their recommendations will be out by Jan 2022. He was actively involved in the evaluation team of Garib Kalyan mela (under the Gujarat government) wherein each household below the poverty line is given livelihood enhancement toolkits.

Sharing his experience of working with the Mayor of Ayodhya, he emphasises the need for effective bureaucratic and political functioning. Having acquired diverse experiences through travelling, Shubham aspires to create a unique fellowship where fellows can learn by travelling and interacting with people.

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Gargi Hiranman Wale

M.A. Development, 2016-18

Bringing Change at the Grassroot Level

“We are the linkage between the knowledge that we gained and reality, it’s our responsibility to translate this effectively to serve individuals.”

Gargi, a pharma graduate, started her career with the pharmaceutical industry. However, the urge to do something worthwhile made Gargi join the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University, which helped her gain perspective and understanding. After University, Gargi joined Deepak Foundation, Vadodara which is involved in creating and enabling a sustainable environment among rural communities by nurturing safe motherhood and child survival practices as well as livelihood projects. There began her journey as a Project Coordinator, coordinating government-run baseline surveys in Ahmedabad and Vadodara. Gargi’s role at the Deepak Foundation exposed her to many roles and responsibilities which helped her build her confidence, patience, and communication skills.



Gargi has also worked as Project coordinator for the Certificate course in Community Health where students were taught how things are governed in a healthcare system and what kind of facilities are provided at various levels. Through this training, the attempt was to build sensitisation and awareness in the students. Along with that she was also involved in a Health Home Aid course where students are trained for patient care.

Having little idea of what the future holds for her, Gargi expresses that she has a long journey ahead.

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Tsering Tashi

M.A. Education, 2011-13

Giving Monks the Gift of Language

“Like how water takes the shape of the container every time, likewise adapting and adjusting has become part and parcel of life”.

Tsering Tashi is a graduate of the first batch of the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University. Tsering joined the Azim Premji Foundation at Yadgir right after graduating, working for nearly two and half years as a teacher trainer for the Government school teachers which was quite challenging. He briefly volunteered at the Tibetan Department of Education, linked with the Education Department of India.

Currently, Tsering works as an English Teacher at a monastery, teaching basic English and basic Computers to senior monks in the age group of 25 to 40 years who are doctorate in Philosophy and Theology. Tsering finds the work challenging considering factors like the variance in community, age group and different backgrounds. His role has further extended to other monasteries.



Tsering is happy to share that he was able to contribute in English language proficiency of monks. Presently some of his students are pursuing science education at Emory university. He credits the theoretical knowledge he gained at the University for giving him direction and perspective. Tsering believes that to bring change in a situation, we need to view things from their perspective to make it easier to resolve and improve the conditions.

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Pritha Banerjee

M.A. Development 2015-17

Participation in Programme Planning

“Without a participatory approach and consent in field practise, field engagement and programmatic interventions cannot work and remain superficial.”

Pritha works as the manager of corporate partnerships at The Akshaya Patra Foundation Mumbai, Maharashtra. She engages with various corporates across the city of Mumbai to present the work of the foundation with the purpose of aligning with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals. She sees scope of partnerships that extend beyond funding and her role focuses on raising equity of The Akshaya Patra Foundation through awareness, knowledge, and participation of various companies. When partner companies ask about the programmes and platforms, it is important to visualize and quantify the changes that happen within the time frame of a company’s donation period and to make them understand the relevance of outcomes. It is also a challenge to be the first to seek the organisations’ attention as there are always many worthy causes seeking funds.



Pritha believes that the M.A. Education programme has been central to her understanding the value of consent and participation on ground. It has prepared her to look at society through different lenses whereby she could situate complex issues through a wide variety of socio-economic, psychological, and cultural perspectives and come up with nuanced interventions to cater to those problems. Her earlier job at Tata Trusts with the Urban Development and Migration Team enhanced her ability to interact with marginalised communities and enabled improvement of programmes.

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Vaibhav Ganesh Sonone

M.A. Development, 2016-18

Weaving Interdependent Independence

“An individual has their own capacity to make constructive changes in one’s own life. We are fellow co-travellers making the essential push and pull for that realisation.”

Vaibhav works with PRADAN in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh as a Project Executive, where he is part of the cluster facilitation team of the Madhya Pradesh government. His role involves working with women collectives for income and agency enhancement. His work has created an impact on the community through initiatives like promoting horticulture, agricultural interventions, road accessibility, establishing market linkages and by mobilising youth and redefining gender roles. People have moved to horticulture practices and this has increased their income up to four-fold. Awareness about MGNREGA and other schemes and monitoring its implementation resulted in people getting work for 80-100 days instead of only for 25 days and hence limited migration to cities by up to 80%.



Vaibhav has always been keen in participating in social activities through his diverse involvement or volunteering for various initiatives. Envisioning enhancing the agency of people, he aspires to continue his work in tribal areas.

Vaibhav firmly believes in working in a collaborative manner with the women and youth and in upholding their independence as a core value. While furthering a rights-based approach, the belief is that human identities are crucial and must not be regarded as mere beneficiaries by the government.

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Mohammed Illias K

M.A. Education, 2013-15

Inculcating Values in Young Minds

”Let the students explore, do not teach them.”

Mohammed Illias is an Academic Coordinator in ZeeQue and takes care of curriculum planning and implementation and teacher training. ZeeQue preschool network conducts 3-years of preschool classes, has 140 centres both within and outside India, with over 10,000 students and more than 1000 teachers. He finds the environment favourable and a step closer in achieving his vision of inculcating values in children right from a young age.

Mohammed is glad to say that life at Azim Premji University made him pan Indian. The vibrant learning atmosphere in the University gave him a chance for great exposure and interaction. His choice of the ‘Teacher Professional Development’ and ‘Assessment’ courses as electives set the stage for some of the key learnings in various



aspects of education which helped him understand the educational scenario better. Much to his satisfaction, he found the learnings greatly helpful and useful in his present job where he implements them in the best way possible.

Mohammed worked as a teacher and a language trainer with an NGO before he decided to join an M.A. Education programme. Being surrounded by young men choosing to earn money over a higher education to serve the country better, he nurtured a vision to change the mindset of the youth in his community. His belief is that everyone should utilize their youth in acquiring knowledge.

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Muhammed Nuhman

M.A. Education, 2015-17

Providing Access to Quality Education

“There is a need to help schools improve their capabilities to the largest extent possible so that they can become ideal educational institutions which the society needs.”

As the Academic Counsellor and core team member at Hikewise Learning, Nuhman has a vision of helping schools become ideal centres of learning. The organisation provides quality online learning programmes along with personalized academic mentorship and career development services for candidates who have been left out of mainstream education due to various reasons.

After University, he joined Chippersage, in Bangalore, where he worked as an implementation lead for curriculum and material development in language. Between 2018 to September 2020, he was working for their school project in the Kozhikode district of Kerala. The job was really challenging due to the implementation of progressive ideas like teacher professional development in a



conservative society. Nuhman strove on and through his relentless efforts along with well-planned strategies he was able to bring small but relevant changes in the mindset of the stakeholders associated with the school. The very fact that the school authorities insisted that he keeps in touch with them and continues guiding them, Nuhman considers it an achievement in his professional life.

Nuhman accredits learnings from Azim Premji University for igniting the spark to follow his conscience, motivating him to work in the field of education and reaffirming his faith that “Every child has the right for quality education”.

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Stuti Goswami

M.A. Public Policy and Governance, 2016-18

Nurturing Active Citizens

“The foundation of a responsible citizen is laid early therefore empowering young minds is equivalent to enabling society.”



Stuti works with Children’s Movement for Civic Awareness (CMCA), Bangalore as a Programme Associate. CMCA aims to create responsiveness among school children on fundamental rights and duties as ascribed in the Indian Constitution and thus empowers them to be active citizens right on, by letting them know about their duties, and enabling them to resolve basic civic issues. CMCA works with young school students, upto college-level” through voluntary educators using specially designed sessions around different topics like Local Government, Gender, Diversity and Composite Culture, Harmony with Nature, etc covered throughout the academic year.”

Stuti is responsible for the organisation’s outreach for their programmes called ‘CMCA online’ and ‘Campus Yuva’. She reaches out to private schools to get onboard with the organisation and

overlooks the entire implementation of the programme with the new and existing network of schools. Stuti is also involved in volunteers’ orientations, management, monitoring and scheduling their sessions at onboarded schools. She has been trained in taking CMCA sessions and often takes these sessions herself.

In a short span of a year, Stuti could witness the impact of the programme among school children as it made them more conscious of their everyday behaviour and gain more knowledge of their fundamental rights and duties as citizens. She shares that dealing with children could be challenging at times but manages to navigate her way through this by adapting to innovations while engaging with children.

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Abhijeet Kumar

M.A. Development, 2014-16

Uplifting Rural Communities

“I wanted to be useful to society as I am very passionate about working with the rural community.”



Abhijeet Kumar recently joined Borlogue Institute of South Asia(BISA) at Pusa, Bihar as a Project Assistant where he is working on a climate-resilient agriculture project with the Govt of Bihar and 3 other agriculture universities as implementing partners with BISA. Prior to this, he was working with Seva Mandir in Udaipur, Rajasthan which works on enhancing livelihoods, education, women and child development and natural resource management. Abhijeet was associated with the organisation for five years in different capacities. He looked after three projects in the organisation which were community development around heritage restoration, waste management, and holistic rural development programme. He also worked as a subject matter expert in the livelihood programme

which focussed on holistic development of the villages. He was also involved with donor reporting as well as implementation and evaluation of the projects.

Abhijeet pursued computer engineering due to the limited awareness about career opportunities available. His awareness about the vast career opportunities in other fields and his desire to work for the society made him join the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University. He wishes to continue his work towards the upliftment of rural communities.

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Shreeradha Mishra

M.A. Development, 2014-16

Improving Public Education Systems for Better Childhoods

“If you are a development practitioner, always know that what you know is only the tip of the iceberg.”



Shreeradha works with Peepul, a Delhi-based NGO working to reform public education in India through deep and meaningful partnerships with communities and local, state, and national governments. The organisation’s aim is to transform the education ecosystem systemically to ensure meaningful student-teacher interaction in India’s public schools, with the aim of improving student learning outcomes. Their work has an impact on 2.9 lakh students and 6000 teachers in Delhi and 3,00,000 teachers in Madhya Pradesh. In her role as Senior Associate – Strategy & Operations, Shreeradha works on programme design and implementation, strategic and thought leadership communications, donor relationships and strategic partnerships.

Prior to her current experience, Shreeradha worked in the child protection sector for four years, in roles that involved programme implementation, communications, research, capacity building and

community mobilisation. Her experience led her to the education sector, as she believes quality public education is a crucial index to ensure protected and healthy childhoods and has the potential to transform communities. She says, “some of the most meaningful exposure and work towards my passion for child protection and education was facilitated by Azim Premji University, and because of the mentors I found in my professors. I feel overcome with gratitude that I have had the privilege and opportunity to study and practice what I am passionate about – just, equitable, humane, and sustainable development.”

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Manasaguru B

M.A. Development, 2016-18

Helping Children Develop their Full Potential

“We always have an idea of a change overnight but change is an ongoing process, it requires a lot of patience; but when you see the results, it will be worth it.”

Manasaguru joined The Action Northeast Trust (ANT) after completing the M.A. Development programme in 2018 from Azim Premji University. ANT works towards interventions in children’s education and teaching them life and leadership skills through sports, facilitating science practicals in middle schools, promoting leadership in girls, and facilitates mental health programmes along with the prevention of domestic violence.

Manasaguru was part of the Dolphin project for children and adolescents as well as the Learning and Mentoring Project (LAMP). He monitored the different projects undertaken by the organisation, contributed to research and documentation, provided technical support, and helped organize various events. Working on child rights, he disseminated the right to development and protection, which included schooling, training on livelihood opportunities after education and closely worked with village institutions to strengthen already existing civic bodies, mainly School Management Committees



and Village Level Child Protection Committees. This vast field of work provided Manasaguru the flexibility to work across verticals and different projects and interact with diverse communities of Bodo, Santhals, Koch-Rajbongshi, Bengali and Nepali people.

One of his fulfilling experiences has been participating in ‘The Theatre of the Oppressed’, a play organised to highlight the prevalent social issues. The audience, which was the community, participated in finding out solutions to the addressed problems. “Seeing the community reflect and participate, gave me a feeling of immediate result, something that is rare in the development field where you have to patiently wait for results for several years”, says Manasaguru.

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Rathan Sudheer

M.A. in Public Policy and Governance, 2017-19

Finding Solutions for a Healthier Environment

“I receive satisfaction in the hope that the research contributed by my work will someday be utilised to bring policy change.”

Rathan is a Research Associate for the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago - India (EPIC), a research organisation working on energy and environment issues throughout India. It works on providing access to affordable energy and identifying low-cost solutions to tackle pollution by partnering with state and local governments to evaluate existing and new policy initiatives related to energy and environment. His role involves all aspects of research implementation like data collection and management, data analysis, participating in research design discussions as well as meeting the stakeholders of the project which includes government officials.

Rathan has worked in solid waste and electricity related projects in Bengaluru. In one of his projects, EPIC-India, Tata Centre for Development at UChicago, and Energy and Environment Lab partnered with Hasiru Dala Innovations to explore the effect of



information on waste management behaviour of residents in Urban Bengaluru. This project is one of the winning ideas in the Bangalore Innovation Challenge.

Rathan developed a keen interest towards quantitative research in the field of energy and environment, at the University and wishes to pursue a PhD in future.

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Sushant Saurav

M.A. Development, 2014-2016

Enhancing Community Mobilisation

“My learnings at university gave me perspective and dimensions for social intervention which I am applying on the ground.”

Sushant has been working with Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action (SRIJAN), an organisation that mainly works in livelihoods and community mobilisation for five years. He is a Project Executive working on agriculture and natural resource management in Shivpuri district of Bundelkhand region where he leads two projects for the Sahariya tribe, a tribe that comes under Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).

Sushant works on an agriculture productivity enhancement programme which will ensure a 30% increment in the productivity of crops for 4,500 families and support the farmers in the promotion of Climate-Smart Agriculture. The other project is on a natural resource management programme which will create water resources like ponds and link them to marginal farmers for critical irrigation through climate-resilient crop selection. Sushant shares



that initially, when the project started, mobilisation of the Sahariya tribe was a challenge and he understands that the results will come over time.

Sushant was studying electrical engineering when he realised that he wanted to work for the social sector and thereby joined the M.A Development programme at Azim Premji University. His courses in the livelihoods specialisation helped build and broaden his perspective. After University, he worked in Rajasthan for three years on the project ‘Saheli Samridhhi’ in collaboration with Rajasthan Grameen Ajeevika Vikas Parishad (Rajeevika) to improve and enhance the tribals livelihood through financial support.

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Joya Jahangir Tamboli

M.A. Public Policy and Governance, 2015-17

Creating Awareness through Research

“The foundation of a responsible citizen is laid early therefore empowering young minds is equivalent to enabling society.”

Joya is a public health researcher and recently joined Selco Foundation as Program Coordinator for their health vertical. Before this she was working with the Public Health Foundation of India as a senior research assistant. Her work involved working with principal investigators to coordinate the work of the project, participating in proposal and creates templates for protocol development, preparing research tools, consent forms, training manuals for the field investigators and standard operating procedures for protocol implementation, giving training to field investigators, preparing project progress reports amongst other things to support research work.

Joya extensively surveyed and studied and did qualitative and quantitative data collection from farmers, field workers, government



officials etc. at Jalna in Maharashtra for her project ‘Health and Wellbeing among cotton seed girls in Telangana and Maharashtra’, where she studied how cotton farming is affecting the bodies of women field workers. Under this project, she found that almost all women suffer from health issues like backache and knee-pain due to the uneasy posture they work in and skin rashes due to use and handling of pesticides in farming. Joya’s project has been recognised and appreciated by Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and has been submitted to several journals for publication. Joya who was a health professional before joining Azim Premji University shares that her learning from the University has helped her immensely in planning and implementing different programmes on the field.

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Nikita Sonavane

L.L.M. in Law and Development, 2016-17

Law as a Tool for Social Change

“Drawing attention to the structural inequality embedded in the criminal justice system.”



Nikita is a lawyer based in Bhopal. She has recently co-founded ‘The Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project’, a legal intervention that investigates through litigation and research, the issue of police targeting marginalised communities, such as the denotified tribes, who were formerly classified as the criminal tribes by the British, and violence against them. The project aims to highlight how policing is ultimately rooted in structures of marginalisation, specifically around the caste system. She would like to highlight the very nature of the system structurally designed to oppress certain communities.

Nikita believes that who the police target ultimately determines who enters the criminal justice system and who ultimately ends up in prison. Through her work, she wants to work towards increasing

the cost of discretionary power enjoyed by the police. Nikita realizes that it takes time to get results but also believes that law can be used as a tool to propel change. She has published a report on the way policing is carried out, by looking at FIRs and arresting data of Madhya Pradesh, particularly during the lockdown.

Nikita shares that her learnings at Azim Premji University are valuable and have helped her locate law in a larger socio-historical context, look at things from multiple lenses, acknowledging the limitations of the law and the potential to harness those limitations.

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Asharam Bhawsar

M.A. Development, 2017-19

Exploring Alternative Livelihoods

“Small producers are the backbone of the progressiveness of the country.”

Asharam Bhawsar is a senior livelihood professional at Samaj Pragati Sahyog, in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh. He works with small and marginal farmers for the implementation of livelihood programmes and helps them explore alternative livelihood opportunities like raising poultry and cattle along with their requirements of hygiene and veterinary care, shelter and fodder.

Asharam's interest in the field of environmental science and sustainable agriculture got clarity and vision during the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University. The elective on livestock, the practicums and field projects helped shape his career in this field.

Based on his experience, Asharam believes that there should be more emphasis on human resource management and the supply



chain management for livestock. A couple of challenges he faced during the implementation of the livelihood programmes is the lack of resilience towards disasters and sudden disease outbreak. A probable solution could be exploring alternate sources of livelihood, however this would take time to reap profit. Asharam hopes to take this forward and continue exploring avenues for alternative livelihoods, devoting himself to work with small and marginal farmer communities.

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Praveen Oraon

M.A. Education, 2017-19

Igniting Hope through Education

“Education is a right by birth, irrespective of your identity. It allows us to know who we are as human beings and allows us to be a volunteer in eliminating darkness through it.”

Praveen Oraon is a Project Coordinator with Gramin Shiksha Kendra at Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, where he anchors two important programmes at present, the English Language Learning Programme and Early Childhood Care and Education. He works towards designing interactive/ alternative content, developing these resources in a way which supports the child’s capacity development both individually and collectively. The interactive programmes make students capable of attaining different skill sets as against the conventional schooling system.

Interactive learning through kitchen gardening where children grow kitchen gardens in the school and place nameplates in a different language are a few of the projects Praveen works on. Project-based learning on various topics where children go to villages and have discussions with the community, collect census data, analyse,



and reflect are some other initiatives. Children narrating news in English in front of their families and communities are proud and fulfilling moments. He also reaches out to parents/communities, seeking community empowerment as a priority in bringing about small changes.

Praveen shares that taking care of the whole school system and its different stakeholders including students and gaining their trust and sustaining it is one of his biggest challenges. He visualises education as fundamental for human development and an alternative education that articulates student’s success in terms of participation, confidence, creativity and the like.

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Aditya Pratap Singh Rathore

LLM in Law and Development, 2017-18

Encouraging Out of the Box Thinking

“Standardised exams alone cannot judge the calibre of students. There’s a need to encourage out of the box thinking amongst teachers.”

Aditya is an Assistant Professor of Law at BML Munjal University in Gurugram, Haryana. He teaches legal methods and constitutional law. He also leads a personalised coaching initiative for the University through which students are helped individually in identifying their areas of improvement in academic skills such as critical reasoning, articulation, and research through customised strategies.

Aditya likes to connect classroom teaching with experiences from the outside world; he is enthusiastic about finding ways to make understanding better for his students. He has earlier worked at National Law University, Jodhpur and National Law School, Bengaluru. Aditya is critical of standard exams that expect standardised answers that do not encourage out of the box thinking. He takes efforts to combine skill building through teaching by conducting various exercises, internal tests, and creative assignments.



Aditya hopes to explore feasible solutions to develop critical thinking among students and is an advocate for diversity of opinion in the classroom. He is keen to support and initiate experiments that introduce innovative ways in curriculum that will develop reasoning skills. Building aptitude required to understand law, changing the conventional ways of how students think, unlearning and maintaining originality, building rationalistic approaches while making legal arguments are some of the challenges Aditya acknowledges and intends to work on.

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Mohammad Faraz

M.A. Development, 2011-13

Working towards Curriculum Development

“Your belief and not your perception can change things.”

Mohammad Faraz is an Academic Consultant with E-DAC learning system, a private education system, where he works on the curriculum with teachers of 20 schools. He is a curriculum developer for the pre-primary up to grade 8 in central Uttar Pradesh. His role entails monitoring the teachers who implement the curriculum in schools, taking sessions for teachers, observing the classrooms, and watching how children respond to this curriculum. During the pandemic, he also supported teachers with online classes.

Faraz started his journey with Azim Premji Foundation at Uttarakhand, as a content developer, associated with the government educational system at the block level. In the four years he worked there, he coordinated with teachers, working in very remote regions. His experience includes working as a consultant



with the Kusuma Foundation in Uttar Pradesh and Odisha where he gained the experience of working for the secondary education system.

Studying at Azim Premji University was transformative for him, especially for his belief system, as there was an opportunity to study and work with people of diverse backgrounds. From his experiences, Faraz says that “We find ourselves contributing individually for the quality of education and it is immensely motivating.”

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Riya Parikh

M.A. Education, 2017-19

Enhancing Learning within Classrooms

“Working in education cannot begin at the level of curriculum or policy, it begins in the classrooms and schools.”

Riya teaches English and Social Studies to primary and middle-school students and engages in teacher research for multi-grade, multi-level teaching.

It was during the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University that Riya recognized the need to teach and work in proximity with classrooms and schools, before engaging in other domains of the education sector. Her search for a space where research and teaching coexist landed her at NIRMAN in Varanasi, at Vidyasharam - the Southpoint School with two school campuses, one in Varanasi and the other in a riverside village called Betawar. Integrating arts in teaching and providing inclusive, integrated and good education regardless of one's economic background are the main aims of this organisation. Along with teaching, she was also



engaged with work related to the children's library, in projects of arts and theatre for education and organised lectures for NIRMAN, thereby creating critical dialogues in education.

Riya's work has helped her gain a better understanding of students' abilities. She hopes to utilise her learnings to make her teaching contextual and effective for students and contribute to the areas of teaching and training, language and critical pedagogy, children's literature/libraries, and educational research. Presently, she is consulting as an early language and literacy expert for different projects with NCERT, Language and Learning Foundation in Delhi and TIDE Learning in Bengaluru.

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Tina Rajendra Pushpa Katakwar

M.A. Education, 2016-18

Redressing the Norms

“Change in society is not easy as it involves collective efforts and an indefatigable spirit.”



Tina has recently joined Azim Premji Foundation in Chhattisgarh, being truly passionate about the field of education. Her interest in education stems from her time working with Learning Links Foundation at Gadegaon in Maharashtra, where she first began engaging with first-generation learners in English.

Tina also worked on the wellness practices of students and community members. She found various superstitions about the sanitation practices for girls which had a direct and indirect impact on their education. She began to see education as an opportunity to overcome these misconceptions about women’s health and hygiene practices. Another myth that Maths is only for boys and girls were supposed to study only arts was dispelled by organising numerous awareness sessions and inviting various role models which made

the people aware that education is for all and should not be decided based on gender.

Tina found changing the mindset of teachers to be highly challenging. But over time, the teacher-student relationship improved and schools became more like joyful learning centres. Parents too started following the best hygiene practices. In her brief years of experience, she believes that each endeavour towards change is very important irrespective of how big or small it is.

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Ankita Guru

LL.M. in Law and Development, 2016-17

Utilising Law to Empower the Grassroots

“Legal empowerment and access to justice are key to the development of nations.”



Ankita completed her course in law in 2016 from Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology University, Bhubaneswar. Her interest in the field of law and development made her join the first batch of LL.M. at Azim Premji University. The course structure was designed to promote critical thinking as well as give a fair view of practice through clinics.

Ankita realised that she wanted to work with law and use it as a tool for empowerment at grassroot level. On graduating from the University in 2017, she cleared the Odisha Judicial Services Exam and is currently serving as a Judicial Officer at Salipur, Odisha. Apart from judicial functions she also takes part in conducting awareness programmes regarding legal empowerment in schools, colleges, and civil society on varied subjects which mostly make people aware of their rights.

Ankita says that courses like Public Law and Governance and Law and Development taught her to reason critically and reflect upon how law is a part of development and how development requires the rule of law. She feels that these interdisciplinary courses have helped her in building a strong foundation and in acquiring research skills.

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Priyadarshi Priyam

M.A. Development, 2011-2013

Everything Begins with Believing in Oneself

“I gained enough confidence to try out new things. You just have to jump at opportunities to pursue your dream career path and you’ll figure it out along the way.”

Priyadarshi is a development practitioner working as the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator with Corstone India Foundation at Patna, Bihar. As a practitioner, he is engaged in Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) and research on longitudinal studies of curriculum in schools.

Having worked widely on emotional resilience as part of the organisation’s project on building life skills, Priyadarshi was engaged and involved in evaluating a programme with different tools and techniques on emotional resilience and mental health among the students which has added some novel insights into solving developmental issues. The current pandemic situation and the shift to digital space brought forth many challenges. Solutions on improving the cognitive abilities of students and teachers were supported by a study conducted by his team during the year.



Priyadarshi describes his experience of working closely together with the teachers, the staff, and the students as a positive outcome which has shaped him as a person and all the stakeholders responsible to understand the importance of it. He has always grabbed opportunities that came his way and adapted himself to experience the professional journey to the fullest. The vibrant environment at Azim Premji University has left a footprint on his life and he aspires to create meaningful change in the sector.

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Sandesh Kotte

M.A. Development, 2011-13

Ensuring Nutritional Diets at the Grassroots

“My upbringing in a village and eco system around me always inspired me to work for the betterment of people.”



Sandesh Kotte, a first batch graduate of the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University, works as a Programme Officer for Tata Trusts in Hyderabad. He leads the Trusts projects in Nutrition domain in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states. His work as a consultant enables him to improve the health and nutrition of thousands of people across the project geographies state ensuring a nutritional diet for them. This includes initiating, implementing, and monitoring the projects in the nutrition domain along with managing grants.

With an integrated view of the development sector, imparted from Azim Premji University, Sandesh's efforts are more concentrated on bringing the anganwadis to the central stage of ensuring the

health and nutrition of the rural areas. Tata Trust started their work making the anganwadis more child-friendly, then with an active collaboration with the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) and other government departments, their work became successful enough to transform the situation of pathetic health and nutritional conditions of many beneficiaries villages.

Are there institutions better than anganwadis to improve health and nutrition outcomes make development projects more successful at the grassroots level? Questions such as this trigger development practitioners like Sandesh to develop new perspectives

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Robin Infant Raj

M.A. Development, 2012-14

Enhancing Agriculture through Technology

“Development studies have changed my perception of seeing things in the natural world. Observing, interpreting and analysing the surrounding environment with clear perspectives as a socially responsible person and doing little things will create a small impact for greater good.”

Robin is a National Technical Expert with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations(FAO), India in Hyderabad. He currently works in coordination with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), National Institute of Nutrition(NIN) and National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management(MANAGE) to strengthen capacities of government officers, policy makers and project implementers on promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture (NSA) and food systems and adapt these e-learning modules to the Indian context.

Robin’s responsibilities include designing, developing and reviewing the course content to suit the needs of the Indian curriculum. He also supports the integration of the course, jointly delivering sessions for the NIRDPR training programmes on NSA and food systems along



with monitoring the implementation and addressing challenges. His work also involves developing and strengthening the capacities of students, professionals, government officials, and other stakeholders, who are involved in the nutrition and the agriculture sectors in the country. One of his major challenges is creating awareness and interest among the stakeholders to understand the importance of nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems.

Robin’s skill in coding combined with his expertise in the development sector brings fresh perspective and ideas to every project he undertakes.

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Thulasidas

M.A. Education, 2013-15

Bringing Alive Sustainable Development Goals

“Sustainability is about teaching individuals how to do something, not always doing it for them.”



Thulasidas works as the Block Implementation Manager for the ‘Road to School’ project, a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of Ashok Leyland in association with Learning Links Foundation. The project focuses on bringing to life Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that focus on basic numeracy and literacy skills, malnutrition, community development and sanitation.

Thulasidas oversees the execution of the project in Tiruchengode block in Namakkal, Tamil Nadu by coordinating and regulating the work on the field. The satisfaction of examining reports that reflect on the impact of the project always motivates him to continue working relentlessly. His 15-16 hour work schedule is accompanied by myriad day-to-day challenges ranging from clarifying misinformation or miscommunication with school authorities and government officials to organising substitute coordinators in the field due to

an emergency. Even during the pandemic, his team ensured that the learning levels of children were maintained by giving children numeracy and literacy-based worksheets and following-up with them.

Thulasidas uses his ability to communicate and problem-solve to empower his team to stride forth with resilience. He started his career as a Computer Science Engineer but a desire to work in the development sector guided him to the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University. He believes that his professional development will help him contribute more efficiently and effectively to the field.

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Vaishnavi Mohan

M.A. Education, 2016-18

Educational Innovations at the Grassroots

“Do good and be good.”

Vaishnavi is a teacher in Pokhrama Foundation Academy in Pokhrama village in the Lakhisarai district of Bihar. She teaches English, Maths and theatre along with developing the curriculum followed in the school and determining the syllabus for the class in consultation with teachers. She collaborates with organisations outside the school to invite women professionals to interact with students to create awareness about the immense opportunities for women. Vaishnavi feels immensely proud when she sees students coming out of their shells and showing curiosity towards learning.

Vaishnavi, an engineering graduate, started her career in education with a fellowship with Teach for India and then joined the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University. Her prior experience helped her relate the educational theories and learning at the University with her practical experience at Teach for India.



Vaishnavi’s experience also includes working as an Educational Specialist for quality improvement of literacy and numeracy with the Andhra Pradesh State Social Welfare Department. Here, she was monitoring 189 residential institutions from grades 5 to 12 for ST/SC students, finding gaps within the system and designing programmes for bridging the gap and implementing the same. Vaishnavi reflects that her work is a drop in the ocean.

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Vishnu Vijayan

M.A. Education, 2016-18

Finding Rhythms in Life

“Children should be allowed to see all the colours of the rainbow, not just one.”



Vishnu is a tabla instructor at Headstart School, Bangalore. Having had a long-standing relationship with music from a fairly young age, he has explored art through tabla. Over time, he has identified an intersectionality between teaching and music and chose to pursue that. He says there is music all around us and it's only a matter of finding that rhythm, playing around with it and exploring it. He believes that the narrative and the exclusiveness around music and art must change to make it more accessible.

While previously working at a government school in Bangalore, Vishnu encouraged students to make their own instruments from everyday things found at home thereby validating that music is

found all around us and not just in instruments. His belief is that music must be brought into the mainstream system, not just as a co-curricular or optional subject in schools, following the stipulations that the National Curriculum Framework promotes with respect to music. Studying at Azim Premji University has helped him explore the idea of aesthetics and understand the potential that art has in the lives of children.

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Shashi Bhushan Kumar

M.A. Education, 2012-14

Creating Student Friendly Learning Spaces

“There is no space for mistakes in teaching. We are doing a sophisticated task of preparing human beings for their life.”

Shashi Bhushan works as a teacher trainer in the Indian wing of an international development organisation Humana People to People. Collaborating with the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), he works with teachers of government schools. The programme implementation is done through a methodology, doctrine of modern method which incorporates activity-based learning, art integrated learning, student centric-student driven teaching learning practices and so on in teacher training. The training also includes extensive travelling, community visits and interventions, and so on. The intervention helped transform D.El. Ed classrooms into student friendly learning spaces, eventually transferred into school classrooms through effectively trained teachers. Many government schools have now adapted this modern method over the traditional one.



Shashi Bhushan’s journey in the field of education began when he joined Pratham as a teacher. His interactions with children motivated him to pursue education and he joined Azim Premji University. After graduating, he joined Humana People to People, where initially adapting to the programme faced a lot of resistance from students and teachers.

Shashi Bhushan recalls some key lessons about innovative pedagogical practices from Azim Premji University substantially aided his work in the field. He dreams to eventually start his own school where students can have a good learning experience at a low cost.

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Prashant Keshav

M.A. Education, 2012-14

Transforming Careers to Achieve Personal Excellence

“Exploring the myriad possibilities of career and striving to shift the narrative from market-driven careers to interest-driven ones.”

Prashant Keshav runs Career Buddy, a career guidance and advisory firm in Pune, Maharashtra. Along with two partners he started this firm in 2020 with the aim of enabling and preparing fresh graduates and young aspirants for the professional world along with empowering the experienced to seek greener pastures and accelerate career growth. The team carries out a diagnosis to analyse an individual's requirements and offers customised need-based solutions.

Prashant has a clear vision, spirit and focus to alter job mindsets, transform careers, and yield a more excellence oriented professional environment. Building credibility, reaching out to the audience, and making efficient investments are only some of the challenges that stand before Career Buddy as it strives to shift the narrative from market-driven careers to interest-driven ones.



Prashant, an MBA graduate, worked with several telecommunication firms for a decade. But a deep sense of dissatisfaction with corporate jobs and a weekend volunteership with Bharti Foundation where he engaged in conversations about the importance of education with migrant children and the myriad possibilities of careers, transformed into pursuing the M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University. The course set the stage for him to comprehend the theoretical and field reality of the education system in rural and urban settings. His vast experience of working in many firms working on team management, donor management, impact, and implementation monitoring, and organising capacity building workshops prepared him to start Career Buddy. (www.careerbuddy.net.in)

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Ashish Sharma

M.A. Education, 2012-14

Capacitating Science Teaching and Learning

“Perspectives and thinking out of the box makes things easier.”



Ashish works as a teacher trainer at Azim Premji Foundation, having donned many other roles for the past seven years. As a teacher trainer for science, he works on science awareness, connecting basic life observations and activities to scientific knowledge and concepts. He also contributes to content creation in the teaching-learning modules.

As part of his role, Ashish visits many schools, works with teachers and students, identifies challenges, conducts workshops, supports local/ block level engagements such as capacitating teachers through organising different trainings for Children With Special Needs, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation, State Initiative for Quality Education etc. Due to his sheer dedication towards inducing science and technology knowledge in the students, many students participated and won prizes in the National Level Science Congress. He is also involved in Field Researches, astronomy for

science awareness, dedicated work with different subject groups, engaging teachers and community by working on Science and Society.

Ashish started his career as a teacher of physics and chemistry in an engineering college. After a year and a half, he felt the need to study further, thereby joining Azim Premji University in 2012. His passion to work on the ground, made him join Azim Premji Foundation in 2014 after graduation.

Ashish admits that dedication towards work is the greatest success mantra in his work life. The knowledge he acquired at Azim Premji University to see things with different perspectives, to think out-of-the-box and respond suitably to situations, is helping him tackle challenges, limitations and circumstances in the field.

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Varun Namineni

M.A. Development, 2017-19

Building Bonds with Rural Communities

“While working with agrarian communities, the process of learning and unlearning goes on continuously.”



Varun works as a Junior Programme Manager for Gram Vikas, Gajapati district in Odisha, where his role revolves around linking people with social security schemes like pension, ration cards and Aadhaar services. It also includes an assortment of inter-related themes like conservation of water, WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene) and technological interventions.

Varun actively worked on designing a water quality management programme to monitor the quality of water that Gram Vikas supplies to households along with sensitising rural communities about water quality. His work requires a careful synthesis of management skills as well as a need to maintain a thriving social capital within the community. Gram Vikas has been present in Gajapati district for over four decades and the community has symbiotic relationship with the organisation and are mostly welcoming to the team. The little things Varun has been able to accomplish through his role with

his team are much appreciated by the community and has made a positive difference in their lives. The result has been the creation of strong bonds of mutual trust and egalitarian spirit in an otherwise very reserved rural community.

Varun’s limited experience of rural life, the rural environment and the language barrier was a massive challenge as well as a learning curve. He shares that the theories learned in the M.A. Development programme at Azim Premji University gave him the base to understand and analyse the rural society he works in.

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Ajithraj R

M.A. Development, 2016-18

Reimagining Fisheries Management

“Sustainability and community participation can’t be read in isolation, merging them brings out the most viable solutions.”

Ajith Raj is a research assistant with Dakshin Foundation, currently working on fisheries co-management, a key intervention in the Lakshadweep islands. The larger objective of the intervention is to introduce community-based fisheries resource management by creating a multi-stakeholder body for Lakshadweep islands which thrive on fishing and allied activities.

Ajith’s role is to conduct stakeholder mapping, and along with the team of researchers engage in bringing all the fisheries-related stakeholders on a single co-management platform and facilitate an exchange of ideas, concerns, and thoughts of all stakeholders on fisheries resources. They also work towards creating a large network of stakeholders involving the local fishermen community, panchayat, government officials and policymakers as part of the intervention.



In the last two years, Ajith’s organisation conducted multi-stakeholder meetings and reached out to the community through various means to introduce the idea of fisheries co-management. He is of the opinion that the co-management platform could bring the government and community together and encourage community participation in the process of sustainable management of fisheries resources. Regular interaction with the community has widened Ajith’s understanding on the importance of community participation in natural resource management.

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B Eswara Rao

M.A. Education 2017-19

Working for the Farmers

“In the current scenario, result based management is the need of organisations and community involvement at each stage of the project is a must because the community knows its needs best.”

Eswara works with Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre in Andhra Pradesh as a Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Associate. The organisation works on empowering small, marginal farmers and landless families through agro-ecology, drought mitigation, natural resources development and sustainable livelihoods. The collective goal of the various projects is to reduce the farmer's input costs and help them get high yield from the diversified crops by the community-based organisations approach. Eswara monitors on ground implementation and fulfilment of project goals. He overlooks two mandals consisting of 60 villages and around 4000 farmers.

A day in Eswara's life generally involves field visits to the villages, focussed group discussions with the Sasya Mitra groups, informal community groups of 20-25 farmers and Farmers Producer Organisations. After discussions with the groups, he analyzes the data and makes reports based on the analysis. This helps the



organisation get a glimpse of on ground issues, challenges, focus areas as well as the success stories. He monitors employees on the ground and helps them with technical and documentation support. Eswara shares that it is not only him who monitors the project, he works side by side with the community; every day on the field is a new learning from them. The M.A. Education programme at Azim Premji University and particularly the course on Educational Governance and Decentralization has tremendously helped Eswara understand and execute his projects.

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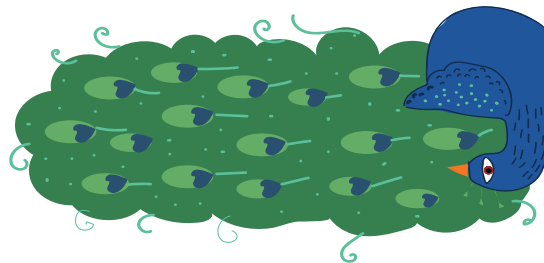
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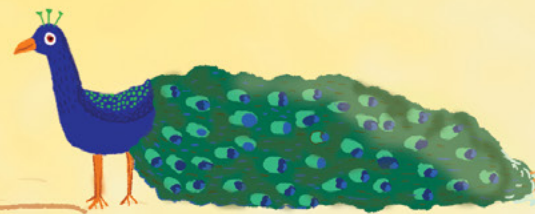
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