






25
YEARS OF SAAHAS






2001 – 2026




SAAHAS · CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Courage in Action

25 years of purpose, partnership, and action





25 YEARS OF SAAHAS | SAAHAS

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SAAHAS @ 25 · 2001–2026

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01

Note from the Founder

Wilma Rodrigues

The Solid Waste Management and Handling Rules 2000 were the foundation on which the idea of Saahas was constituted and structured. These were the first set of comprehensive regulations introduced by the Government of India through the Ministry of Environment.

For me this was the ultimate push to act on frustration that had been building right through the 1980s and 90s. As a youngster in those days, I was deeply pained by the extent of litter and public indifference.

There are memories at my first job, as a tour guide where I stood outside the Meenakshi temple in Madurai brimming with pride as I introduced German tourists to the architecture of the temple. But the ugly piles of waste at the adjoining street was a cringe and a conflict which needed to be resolved.

"Today, what do I see as I stand looking at Saahas as much from the outside as also from the inside? I see determination for the head and the heart to work together."



Then there was the dystopian behavior that I experienced every week queuing up in front of a supermarket counter to buy weekly groceries which came with a horrendous number of plastic bags.

Amidst this yearning to be the change and make a difference, I am grateful to the universe for conspiring with other positive forces to guide and support an alternative direction.

This was the time when Almitra Patel moved the supreme court to bring us the game-changing regulations. There was grass roots work done by Anslem Baretto and Waste Wise Trust. Then there was a retired NASA Scientist Dr Balasubramaniam who demonstrated decentralized composting for 200 households through a PPP model in Sanjay Nagar, Bengaluru.

I was fortunate to be able to join the work that was already underway. It began with many breakfast meetings with Zia DeSouza, who for a brief period, played the role of a co-founder of Saahas. The turning point came soon enough when Saahas received its first cheque, for Rs 1 Lakh, following due process and transparency from the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board. *There was no looking back.*

The universe has been beyond kind to ensure the spark from the early days gave way to a steady flame thanks to the stream of leaders who shaped the subsequent years. Divya Tiwari, Archana Tripathi, Sonia Garga, Mahesh, Sunita and many others ensured that passion worked alongside professionalism. A supportive board, aligned partners, and an incredible team further enhanced the support that was needed.

Today, what do I see as I stand looking at Saahas as much from the outside as also from the inside? I see determination for the head and the heart to work together. I feel the strength that has emerged from meeting the many challenges of the last 25 years.

There is confidence that the universe will continue to guide our energies as we begin the next leg of our journey of another 25 years. This coffee table book is a tribute to everyone who played a part in keeping the flame burning.

02

25 Years at a Glance

Twenty-five years of enabling circularity on the ground.

Saahas means courage, and in 2001 it took some to register a non-profit, founded on the belief that waste is a resource in the wrong place, and that using less, reusing more and recovering resources should shape how we think of waste.

What began as two people at a borrowed desk in Bengaluru now reaches 12 states, 29 districts, 550+ Gram Panchayats and 30+ towns and cities. The pages that follow trace that journey, year by year.

2001 – 2009
Building the foundation

2010 – 2017
Navigating the middle

2018 – 2026
Spreading the wings far and wide

A Timeline 2001–2026

2001 — 2009
Building the foundation, one step at a time

From two people in borrowed office space to a model that industry, municipalities and households would pay for.

2010 — 2017
Navigating the middle

Finding our feet, growing stronger and wiser along the way.

THE BEGINNING

Two people, one borrowed desk
Wilma Rodrigues founds Saahas in Bengaluru with former colleague Zia Sahu, beginning with a focus on sustainable waste management and practical action on the ground.

2001

FOCUS ON REDUCE

Less Plastic For Me
The first campaign, backed by KSPCB. Shops and supermarkets are persuaded to reduce usage of plastic carry bags; cloth bags offered in their place.

2001 –12

DECENTRALISED PROCESSING

The first on-site waste management system
A waste management facility opens inside the SBI campus, Bengaluru — offering waste management as a service.

2004

A NEW WASTE STREAM

Improving e-waste collection & processing
Collection begins for CDs, batteries and floppies. Two informal recyclers are supported in getting KSPCB authorisation.

2006 –10

REVERSE SUPPLY CHAINS

The first EPR partnership
With funding by Tetra Pak, a reverse supply chain is built for used cartons across Bengaluru, Mysore–Channapatna, Hyderabad and Chennai.

2008 –17

COMMUNITY UNITS

Kasa Rasa (The Essence from Waste)
The first decentralised Community Waste Management Unit is set up in Bengaluru.

2011 –12

A BUSINESS MODEL FOR WASTE

Saahas Zero Waste branches out
Saahas Waste Management Pvt Ltd branches out as a for-profit entity. Two Saahas entities, rooted in the vision for a circular economy.

2013

NEW BEGINNINGS

Leadership transition
Divya Tiwari takes over as CEO from Wilma Rodrigues.

2014

TO THE VILLAGES

Beyond the Broom
The first rural project, in Ballari district, Karnataka. Blue bags on village doors become the mark of household segregation.

2015

NORTH OF THE VINDHYAS

Alag Karo
The first large source-segregation project outside South India, in Gurugram, with a focus on bulk waste generators.

SCALING UP E-WASTE

bE-Responsible
The e-waste intervention in Bengaluru expands to cover both awareness and collection from non-bulk consumers.

2017



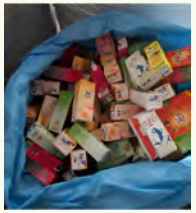
The original Saahas logo, 2001



The Less Plastic For Me campaign poster, 2001


On-site waste management, SBI campus, 2004




Used cartons collected for the Tetra Pak return route


Kasa Rasa, the first community waste management unit


Divya takes over, 2014


Blue bags at village doors, Ballari district


Alag Karo, Gurugram, 2017


E-waste collection vehicle, Bangalore

2018 — 2026

Spreading the wings far and wide

From Karnataka to pan-India, urban to rural, pilots to scale, a journey of learning and sharing.

2018

RURAL FOOTPRINT EXPANDS

Bharuch, Gujarat, Alwar, Rajasthan

Rural work begins in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and widens in Karnataka.

SMALL CITY FOCUS

Mission Swachh Udupi

First city-wide intervention in Udupi.

REDUCING DUMPSITES

Kasa Kiosk

First manned kiosk set up in Bengaluru.

2019

KNOWLEDGE SHARED

Collaboration with grassroots NGOs

Collaboration with grassroots NGOs like Sewa Mandir in Rajasthan and Gram Vikas in Orissa, for wider dissemination of SWM knowledge.



Leadership evolved, the purpose remained.



Kasa Kiosk, first manned collection point in Bangalore

2020



Archana takes on the baton, 2021

POLICY SUPPORT

Policy, Strategy and Bye-laws for Rural Karnataka ratified

Support to the Government of Karnataka in drafting the policy, strategy and bye-laws for solid and liquid waste management in rural areas.

2021

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Change in leadership

Divya Tiwari hands over the baton to Archana Tripathi, moves to lead the new Knowledge Vertical.

SCALE

HCL Grant Winner

Launches its first large rural programme in Karnataka, covering four MRFs across four districts and 145 Gram Panchayats under Paripurna intervention.

NEW WASTE STREAMS

Pilots for Construction & Demolition Waste and Bulky Waste

Launches first pilots for the two new waste categories, in Bengaluru.

2022



Paripurna MRF, rural Karnataka, 2021



Circular Realty



Animation film 'Tenko' made with support from Clean Destination

NEW TERRAIN

Clean Destination Panna

Launches Clean Destination in the buffer zones of Panna Tiger Reserve, in partnership with the MP Tourism Board.

2023

FORAY INTO THE NORTHEAST

Jabor Mukta Jorhat

Assam interventions begin in Jorhat, followed by Majuli in 2024 and Kaziranga in 2025.

EMPANELMENT

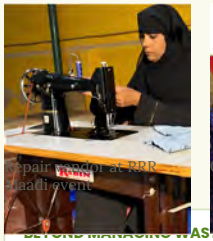
Swachhata Knowledge Partner

Empanelled by MoHUA as a Swachhta Partner, separate vertical for Capacity Building is launched.



Jabor Mukta Jorhat, Assam, 2023

2024



Repair session at RRR Maadi event



Cycle of Change

BEYOND MANAGING WASTE

Reduce and Repair

Repair campaigns and the annual RRR Maadi festival begin.
Cycle of Change, a dedicated campaign focusing on sustainable menstruation launched.

2025

TAKING CIRCULARITY TO SCHOOLS

Circonomy 101

A handbook for Circular Economy 101 is published; a dedicated vertical for education gets launched.

INSTITUTIONALISING KNOWLEDGE

Capacity building in Andhra Pradesh

Large capacity building programme for Swachh Andhra Corporation executed in partnership with the WASH Institute.



Circonomy 101 handbook, 2025



Capacity Building in Andhra Pradesh

2026

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN

And the Journey Continues

Working across 12 states, 29 districts, 550+ Gram Panchayats and 30+ towns and cities.

03

Moments that Shaped Us

25 stories. 25 turning points.

Twenty-five years are not made of milestones alone. They are made of moments: a campaign at a supermarket counter, a blue bag in a village, a policy written with a state government, a botanical garden, a campus, a frontier.

The stories that follow are the turning points that shaped how Saahas works. Each began as an experiment in a real place, with real people, and each taught us something we carried into the next. Together, they show what courage in action looks like.

2001 → 2026
25 years of work

12 states
from Bengaluru to the North East

Urban · Rural · Eco-sensitive
geographies we learnt from



01

MOMENT 01

A Tale of Two Sisters

For 25 years, Saahas has worked towards a simple but ambitious vision: an India where nothing is waste. At the heart of this journey are two "sisters" — **Saahas, the not-for-profit organisation, and Saahas Zero Waste (SZW), the social enterprise**. Born from the same vision, they play different but complementary roles in building a circular economy.

Founded in 2001, Saahas works as an enabler and catalyst for change. It develops and pilots innovative solutions for solid waste management, works with communities and governments, builds capacity, drives awareness and behaviour change, and provides technical support. Its work spans urban and rural communities and includes source segregation, decentralised waste management, composting, dry waste management, special waste streams, research, assessments and policy advocacy.

In 2013, Saahas Zero Waste emerged as a social enterprise to take these principles into professional, financially sustainable operations. SZW provides end-to-end waste management services, particularly for bulk waste generators such as residential communities, institutions and businesses. It designs and operates systems for collection, segregation, processing and resource recovery, while using technology and data to improve transparency and work towards zero waste to landfill. It also works with brands and producers on responsible recovery of plastic and e-waste under Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

The two organisations are independent, but their purposes converge. **Saahas builds, enables and innovates; Saahas Zero Waste implements, operates and scales.** Together, they demonstrate how non-profit action and social enterprise can work hand in hand to move society from a linear "take-make-dispose" model towards a circular economy — where resources stay in use and, ultimately, nothing is waste.

MOMENT 02

02

Less Plastic for Me



In 2001, as supermarket chains like Foodworld and Nilgiris surged in popularity across Bangalore, shoppers routinely filled multiple plastic bags with their purchases. Grounded in the 2000 solid waste management guidelines that prioritized waste reduction, Saahas launched its very first initiative: the **"Less Plastic For Me"** campaign



Supported by a ₹1 lakh seed grant from the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, Saahas created awareness collaterals and eco-friendly cloth bags. Partnering with the volunteer group *Making a Difference* (MAD) from Hewlett Packard India, volunteers stationed themselves at supermarket checkout counters, providing campaign branded reusable cloth bags directly to shoppers. Running successfully from 2001 to 2005, the campaign laid the foundation for Saahas's vision: 'nothing is waste'. Over the years, we have transitioned from 'less plastic' to no single-use item of any kind - including paper and biodegradables —in favor of sustainable, long-term alternatives.





03

MOMENT 03

State Bank of India Waste Management Setup

How an on-site waste system at the State Bank of India became Saahas's learning lab for accountable waste management.

2003–2015 · Bengaluru
With State Bank of India

IIn 2003, founder Wilma Rodrigues used to regularly visit the lush campus of the State Bank of India on St Marks Road. “The bank was our official bank and during these visits, I realised that the bank generated a lot of both wet and dry waste which was dumped at one end of the campus and very often burnt “, recalls Wilma.

She brought this to the attention of the Chief General Manager at the bank, and it was very encouraging to see a response which was immediate and effective. The bank approved two lakhs for an on-site waste management system. “And that was when I approached Dr. Bala Subramaniam,” she continues, ”a retired NASA official who volunteered his time and his expertise to help us put that system in place - composting tanks, a dry waste sorting center and a mulching center for all their horticultural waste.”

The bank also approved a monthly operational cost—to operate and run the facility with three field staff . And this system operated right from 2003 right up to 2015.

Starting with SBI, we then onboarded operations of other big brands like Microsoft and Texas Instruments. So SBI was our learning lab which helped us build systems—responsible and accountable systems—for waste management.



04

MOMENT 04

The Story of our E-Waste Programs

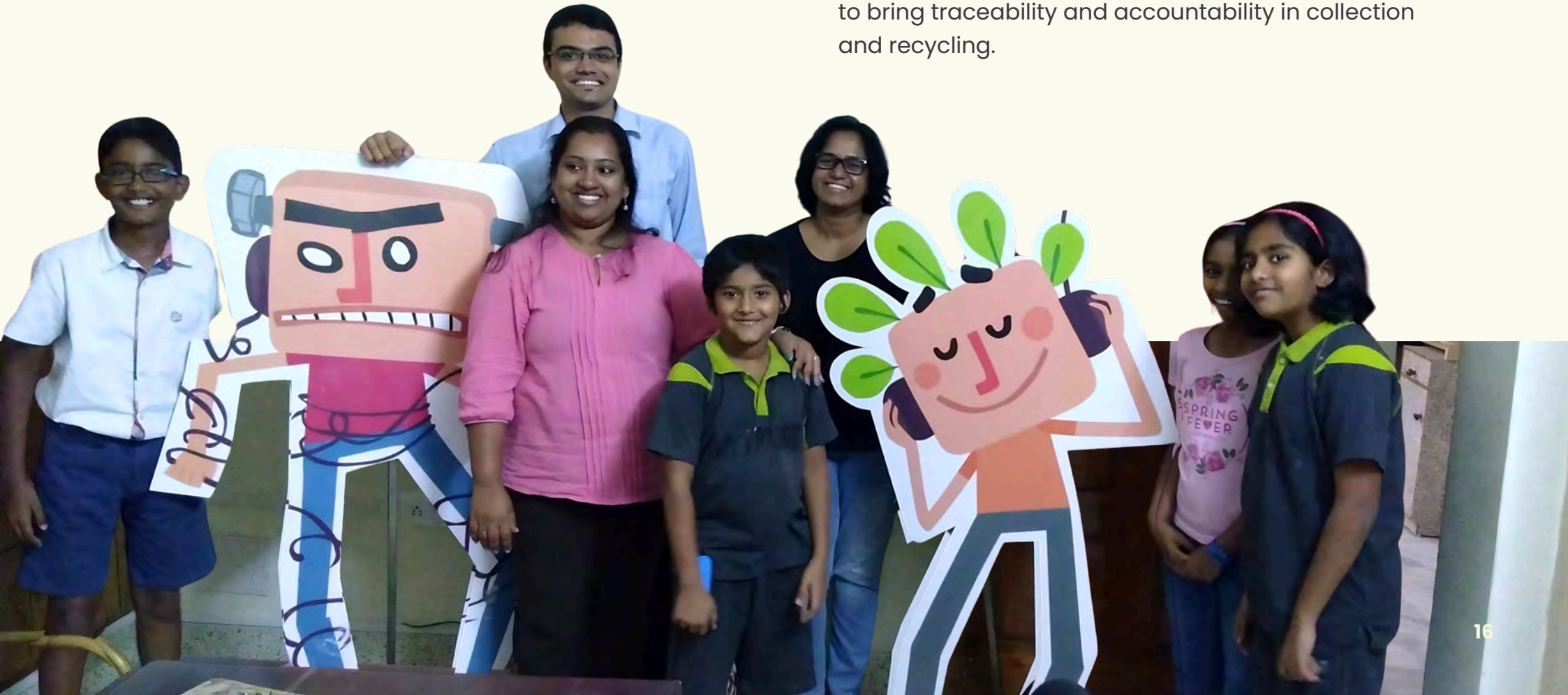
In early 2000's, with the IT boom, the consumption of electronic goods increased rapidly, but very little thought went into the post-use disposal. There were no regulations and the waste was handled by the informal sector in a way that was hazardous to their health and the environment. In 2003, Saahas NGO collaborated with an Indo-German-Swiss venture (HABA) to study the informal recycling sector, exposing dangerous practices such as using unprotected hands with acid to extract precious metals and burning copper wires. Saahas's extensive documentation between 2003 and 2010 directly helped shape India's formal E-Waste Management Rules introduced in 2011.

Addressing e-waste required a unique mindset shift, encouraging people to responsibly dispose of old electronics to authorised processors rather than seeking financial incentive by selling to unauthorised ones . In 2014, backed by funding from EMC², Saahas partnered with filmmaker Vinod Ishwar who produced an award winning short animation film (available on Saahas youtube channel). As the aim was to conduct awareness drives in about 100 schools,the film introduced two iconic characters —"Mental" and "Environmental"— they became very popular and were adopted in many IEC campaigns developed by Saahas in and became our mascots.



Recognizing that awareness alone was insufficient without providing wide and easy access to authorised collection channels, Saahas launched the "bE-Responsible" program (2016–2020) in partnership with Ensyde. We introduced public drop boxes, monthly collection drives, and door-to-door pickups via an app. By scaling collections to 3–4 tons monthly, the program proved that responsible e-waste collection and recycling could operate as a self-sustaining micro-business model.

Anand, who was in charge of the logistics during the project, launched his own entrepreneurial venture offering on-call e-waste pick up service targeting primarily non bulk domestic e-waste with a formal back end tie up with authorised processors. He was able to capitalise on the system that Saahas had built to bring traceability and accountability in collection and recycling.



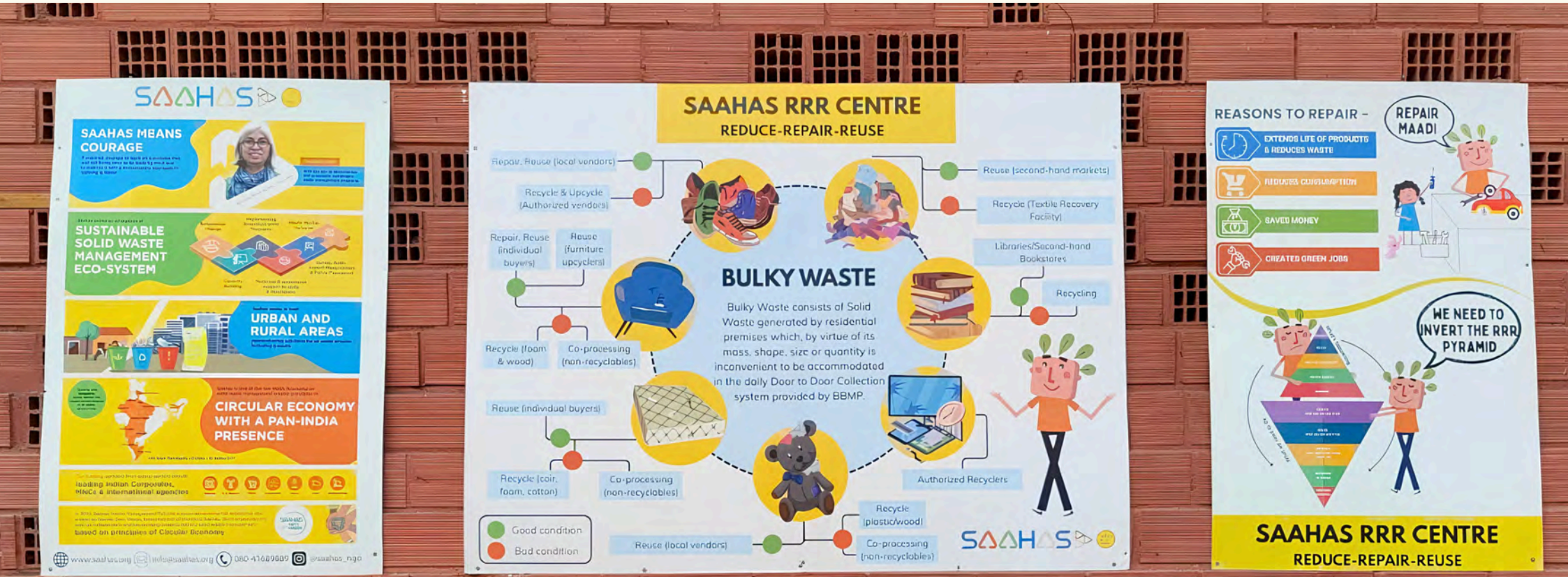
MOMENT 05

Kasa Rasa

05

Building on the success and learnings of the on site waste management system at the State Bank of India, we focussed on managing decentralised residential community waste management.

We started by setting up Kasa Rasa centers (in Kannada ‘kasa’ means waste and ‘rasa’ means extract/goodness, basically denoting the ‘waste to resource’ concept) in Koramangala. With land allocated by the BBMP and backing from partners like CSA, CHF, and Caterpillar Foundation, we launched Kasa Rasa 1 in Ejipura for low-income areas and Kasa Rasa 2 in Koramangala for upper-middle-class neighborhoods.



The centers aimed to sustain operational costs through dry waste revenue and a service fee model. They housed composting tanks for wet waste processing and a covered area for secondary sorting of dry waste. Over the years, the place was used for multiple sustainable waste management initiatives - aggregation of e-waste, construction and demolition waste, bulky waste; bio-methanisation plant that converts organic waste to gas that is piped to a nearby restaurant kitchen. Kasa Rasa 2 was conveniently located in the city centre with ample parking space hence it also became a popular spot for showcasing sustainable waste management practices and served as a learning hub for thousands of students, corporate employees, government representatives and visitors worldwide. It highlighted the critical importance of source segregation, as people visiting could see how much easier and hygienic it was to handle source segregated waste unlike the stinking dump sites people would have often seen. Further, watching the dry waste sorting activity demonstrated that it required significant skill and how challenging multi-material products were as all components had to be separated manually. This often drove in the important message of producing and consuming products that had less packaging and fewer materials, something as simple as using paper tape on paper packages and plastic tape on plastic packages.

Successful partnership with local Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in establishing Kasa Rasas laid the groundwork for future projects like Ecogram in the NCR region which also became a community facility and a knowledge hub for sustainable waste management practices.









06

MOMENT 06

Our Iconic Blue Bag

The Blue Bag for dry waste is a central element of our rural programs. Divya Tiwari (our then-CEO and now Advisor) recalls the moment that shaped our rural waste management system. When we were working out the operational details of our first rural initiative at Ballary, the daily collection of wet and dry waste was becoming a big challenge". The Panchayats were not keen to support this high cost initiative compared to earlier when people just burnt their waste or dumped it in the drains. "During this deliberation, by chance I met Ferdinand Hautz from Germany".

He was running a pretty successful waste management initiative at Anegundi, Hampi and was only collecting non-biodegradable waste. He encouraged people to manage their biodegradable waste by composting or feeding it to animals. He had given this large Yellow colour bag, hung it outside the shops, homes and collected it only once a week. As a result the collection cost was cut down to 1/7th.

The Blue Bag solved 3 biggest challenges -

- **Cost** - Waste would now be collected weekly, cutting down the cost to 1/7th.

- **Source segregation** - If anyone would add wet waste to the bag, it would leak and stink, hence it enforced segregation

- **Delinking collector from generator** - as the bag was hung outside even if people were not at home to handover waste, the collector could collect it.

"Even if people were not at home, the waste was collected on time, with discipline", says Devappa, Regional Manager at Saahas, who was just starting his career as a field supervisor in this project, "this was a big game changer in building trust in the Saahas team and also in deepening association with the SWM initiative." The blue bag has since been used in most of our rural and urban slum interventions and has become like a trademark for Saahas projects.





07

MOMENT 07

Swachh Udupi Mission

2017–2021 · Udupi, Karnataka
With HDB Financial Services and the local government

The **Swachh Udupi Mission**, supported by HDB Financial Services (HDBFS), marked Saahas NGO's first **city wide** solid waste management intervention that covered awareness activities, primary waste collection and waste processing for the entire Udupi city. Executed between 2017 and 2021 in collaboration with the local government guided by the then Deputy Commissioner Priyanka Mary Francis. Primary collection was being managed by the Municipality in some wards and in some wards Self help groups were collecting waste, but there was no source segregation anywhere. So the team started with focussed door to door awareness and also conducted city wide activities to sensitise and motivate the citizens towards maintaining a clean city. We worked on building the capacity of the primary collectors on regulations and monitoring source segregation. A formal route plan was developed for primary collection which was regularly tracked by the Municipal team. SHGs were supported with establishing MRFs to improve waste earnings and resource recovery. Once waste collection got streamlined, the team focussed on waste processing, supporting the Municipality in setting up both decentralised and centralised infrastructure. A biogas plant and a Windrow composting facility were established to manage the organic waste. Linkages to recyclers were set up for managing different types of dry waste.

Beyond managing household waste, the initiative addressed specialized waste streams also like C&D waste and e-waste. The team also addressed market waste, flower waste from local temples, slaughterhouse waste, and coconut shells. A notable highlight of the campaign was the installation and management of a floating trash barrier to capture litter before entering the river. This entailed regular waste removal from the barrier. A short real on the trash barrier became Saahas's first viral social media moment and generated a lot of enthusiasm for Trash barriers.

Despite severe operational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project achieved sustained success through rigorous community outreach and structured waste management program. The Swachh Udupi Mission proved pivotal for Saahas, instilling the organizational confidence to take up large-scale municipal programs. It also established a blueprint for their subsequent regional initiatives, such as the *Paripurna*, *Swachh Karavalli Mission*, and *Pancha Siri* projects across the Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts.

MOMENT 08

Alag Karo.

08

2017 · Gurugram, Haryana
With Coca-Cola, Tetra Pak and GIZ



In 2017, following the release of the SWM Rules 2016, Saahas NGO launched **"Alag Karo"** (‘Alag Karo’ means ‘do separate’ in Hindi) in Gurugram. Supported by Coca-Cola, Tetra Pak, and GIZ, this ambitious initiative aimed to institutionalize source segregation at scale in about 50 apartment communities by working with Resident Welfare Associations as every community didn’t have active volunteers, till then volunteers had been the key force driving source segregation.

For lasting behavior change, Saahas developed engaging IEC materials—including a popular short film; conducted focussed training programs for different stakeholder groups such as house keeping staff, house help, cooks and residents etc.; developed a toolkit for step-by-step implementation of waste segregation in large housing societies and introduced segregation into housekeeping contracts establishing clear KPIs for estate management staff.

This systematic approach transformed segregated waste collection into a structured community routine. The project achieved remarkable impact:

- Reached over **260,000 individuals** across **60,000+ households** and commercial spaces.
- Diverted nearly **50 metric tons of waste per day** from landfills
- Provided safer, dignified working conditions for waste workers
- Prompted half of the 40 participating apartment communities to independently fund on-site composting facilities

Expanding from gated communities to an entire municipal ward in phase 2 and 3, "Alag Karo" marked Saahas’s first major program outside South India, serving as a springboard for its nationwide expansion across North, East, Central, and West India.



Working on Rural Solid Waste Management Policy for Karnataka

09

MOMENT 09

2016–2020 · Karnataka
With RDPR, Government of Karnataka, and CDD



Swachh Bharat Mission was launched on Oct 2nd 2014 to attain the mission of universal sanitation coverage and a clean Bharat. In April 2016, the Solid Waste Management Rules were released which provided a comprehensive legal mandate to be followed for waste management in India. As per the rules, each state was supposed to prepare policy and strategy for waste management and the local bodies were mandated to frame bye-laws incorporating the provisions of the rules within 1 year from the date of notification of the rules.

In response to the SWM Rules 2016, Karnataka was **among the first states** to start work on framing a policy, strategy and model bye-laws for both urban and rural areas. In 2018, the Ministry of RDPR, Govt of Karnataka formed a committee headed by the Mission Director, SBM-G, to formulate the policy, strategy and model bye-laws for sanitation and solid, liquid waste management for rural areas of the state. The objective was to develop a unified implementation framework to enable execution of the provisions of the SWM Rules 2016 and Swachh Bharat Mission Guidelines.

A team comprising practitioners from Saahas and CDD worked with the RDWSD department to draft the policy, strategy and model bye-laws.

Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy was onboarded to legally vet the documents. After a series of field interviews, consultations with the various line departments, and public consultations, the Karnataka policy, strategy and model bye-laws were formally notified in March 2020 making Karnataka the first state to do so for rural areas.

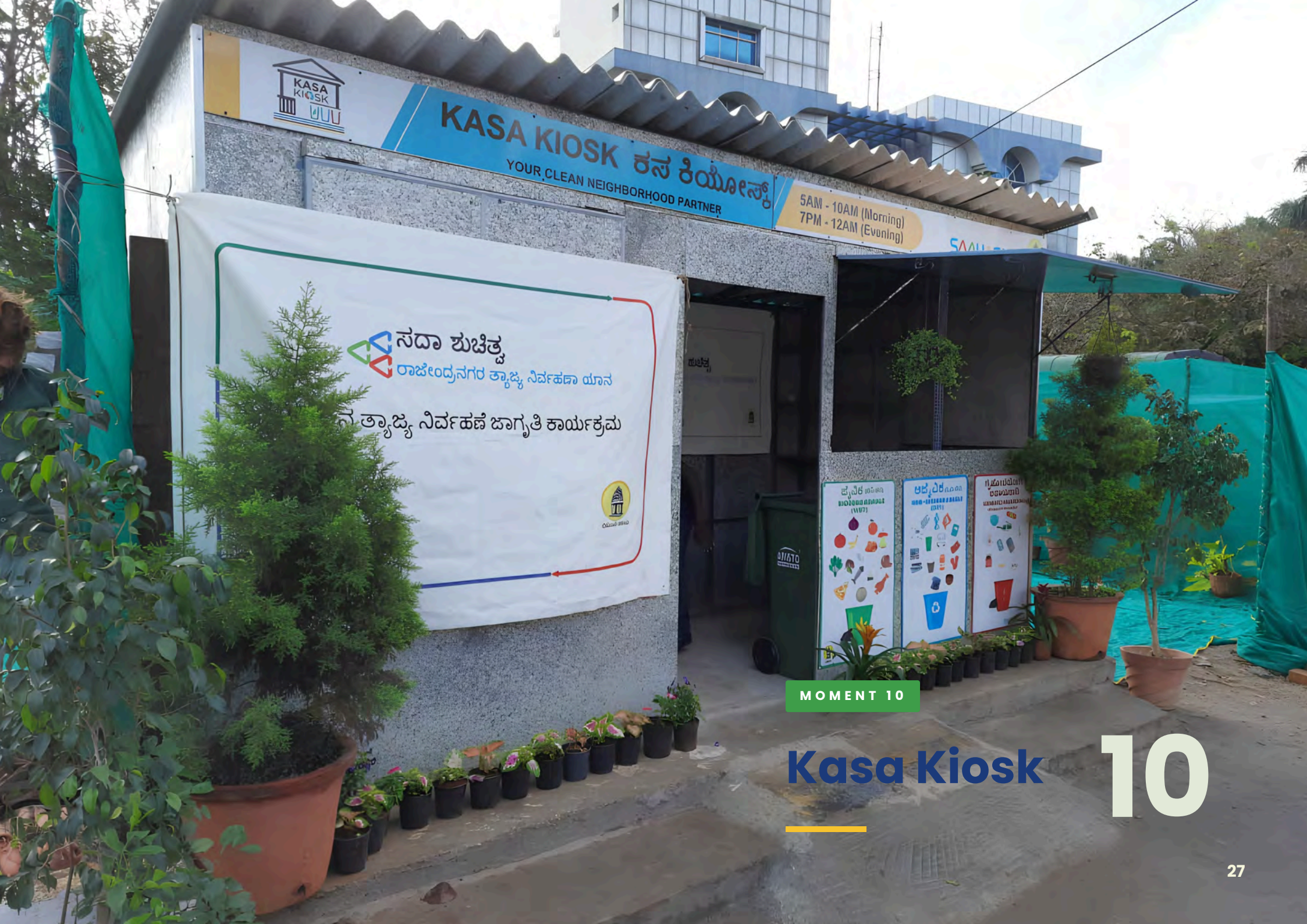
For Saahas, being a part of the entire process was extremely enriching, it gave new perspectives and helped us build our advocacy and policy work, rooted in our field experience and learnings.



Karnataka implements rural sanitation policy

sbmgramin / September 10, 2020 / Uncategorized

In a bold step, the State of Karnataka is the first state to come up with a Sanitation Policy, Strategy, and model By-laws for rural areas. The policy document and strategy lay the roadmap for ODF Plus which includes management of biodegradable and organic waste, plastic waste, and liquid waste.



MOMENT 10

Kasa Kiosk 10

As Saahas does not believe in surface level changes we avoided taking up spot fixing of dump sites or beatification activities. Hence when one of our funding partners requested to fix a stubborn **decade-old dump site on Wind Tunnel Road (Bengaluru)**, we decided to go into the root cause analysis. Our team monitored the spot for 48 hours, who was dumping when and why because unlike at many other places, the waste collection was happening regularly in the locality. Talking to these people we realised they were primarily people who left early morning for work and could not hand over the waste when the collection vehicle came later in the day and small eateries that closed late night, they could not keep the waste overnight as it would attract rats and cockroaches.



Hence we needed a collection mechanism to address these two time slots, morning around 6 to 9 pm and in the night 9 pm to 12 am. We could not ask the collection vehicle to come multiple times, Bangalore is a bin less city so we decided to set up a 'monitored bin station' where people could handover segregated waste during these specific slots. The Municipality supported this unique initiative as we got some space on the foot path next to the existing dump site. The place was cleaned up and the first **8x10 sq ft Kasa Kiosk** was installed in 2019. We didn't want it to turn into a dump site so it was done differently, a beautiful bamboo structure with posters etc. After successfully overcoming early operational challenges, the model expanded to low-income areas like Rajendra Nagar and was later adopted by some other municipalities in different parts of the country.

What we learnt from these pilots was that a kiosk's success relies on community awareness, regular waste clearance, continuous non stop operation, and enforcement measures like CCTV monitoring. Ultimately, it serves as a **supplementary solution** for specific hot spots and is not a replacement for door-to-door collection.



MOMENT 11

11

Paripurna - First rural MRF of Karnataka and establishing plastic collection system in rural areas

Project Paripurna was the project which was pitched for HCL Grant competition by Saahas in 2021 and we were the first Waste Management NGO that won the HCL grant. The project aimed to close a critical gap in the Rural Waste Management system. While the cities had the informal waste workers and also some formal MRF (Material recovery Facilities) to aggregate and sort dry waste, most rural areas had no such systems and most of the dry waste was being locally dumped or burnt as the economics of transporting it to city centers for recycling was not working out.

2021 · Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Ramanagara, Ballari
With the HCL Grant and the Government of Karnataka

. As packaged goods started flooding rural homes, addressing the gap in the dry waste reverse supply chains had become an urgent need. As Saahas was already working in many rural areas of Karnataka, the project focussed on establishing source segregation, primary collection and aggregation in four districts — **Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Ramanagara, and Ballari**— the project was implemented in close collaboration with the state government. Beyond waste management, it focused on providing sustainable livelihoods to self-help groups and integrating new technologies into the supply chain.

The key challenge that the program faced was land allocation by the government for setting up MRFs, there was some opposition by the local opposition who feared that the place will turn into a dumpsite, as they had seen in various earlier initiatives. Saahas team overcame this by conducting deep community awareness campaigns to explain the benefits of MRFs, organised site visits to their other projects where MRFs were operating in good hygienic set up. The community also gained confidence because of their earlier association with Saahas.

Consequently, the first 10 TPD (tons per day) capacity MRF was built in Nitte in Udupi district and the second MRF in Yedapadavu Gram Panchayat in Dakshina Kannada followed Dakshina Kannada built three more 5TPD facilities in Narikombu, Kedambady, and Ujire becoming the first district to map all its gram panchayats to rural MRFs. Remarkably, quite a few local residents, who originally opposed the project, now work at these facilities. While setting up the MRFs was the easier part, the sourcing of adequate quantities of well-segregated dry waste was the bigger challenge. This required strong collection systems in the gram panchayats mapped to the MRFs in the 4 districts and a monitored system for the dry waste to be picked up from the local storage units and brought to the MRFs. This is what the Paripurna team set out to do and was fairly successful in doing. The varying levels of success seen across the four districts also helped us build a diagnostic tool to assess the readiness of a place, which helps design place-appropriate solutions. Under Paripurna Saahas grew its reach from 25 panchayats to over 180 Gram Panchayats, successfully creating an operational roadmap for our rural vertical.








MOMENT 12

12

Circular Waste Solutions

Segregation at source sits right at the top of actions required for resource recovery based waste management and has been a key component of almost all of our work. While Alag Karo in Gurugram focussed on demonstrating how bulk waste generators, specially the high-rise residential societies, can set up a system for ensuring that the residents practice source segregation, the challenge Circular Waste Solutions (CWS) tried to address was achieving source segregation among the non-bulk waste generators. F Funded by Mitigation Action Facility and supported by GIZ, CWS aimed to achieve source segregation in 20 wards in Bengaluru and 6 wards in Trichy. This was a short-term, high impact intervention covering 10 lakh people in Bengaluru and 1 lakh in Trichy.

Till 2021, we had mostly worked in smaller clusters covering up to 20,000 people per year. The approach used to carry out intense door-to-door awareness coupled with community level activities to encourage people to adopt source segregation, followed by strict monitoring of the daily collection by the Saahas field team to identify defaulters. Although this deep touch approach was successful in achieving high segregation percentages, clearly, it couldn't work at the scale required to meet the objectives of the CWS initiative. In order to achieve the required scale, we experimented with three different types of approaches in CWS and we named them - deep touch, medium touch and low touch. Each of the three approaches required different amounts of funds and Saahas personnel to be allocated per 1000 households to achieve the same targets. To compare the results from the three modes, we divided the wards and the teams into three groups, assigned wards to each group and tracked activities and outcomes closely.

While the deep touch team worked directly on the ground and interfaced with the waste generators and the collection staff, the medium touch team adopted an approach of working through the collection staff for awareness and monitoring, coupled with mid-media community events like street plays and awareness using mikes on the collection vehicles. In the low touch mode, the team activated the marshalls and the link workers, who are a part of the municipal solid waste management system and carried out awareness and monitoring through them. Varying results were achieved through the three modes, but what came out clearly was that the sustenance of source segregation practice could be ensured only if the government system was capacitated and strengthened. Identifying local volunteers and handholding them to take up issues with the ward officials on behalf of their ward was found to be one way of ensuring the waste management system works on the ground. We got an opportunity to try out many new initiatives in this program like setting up a helpline for queries related to solid waste management and sustainable living, running large social media campaigns, collaborating with influencers working on sustainability, piloting a model to make markets SUP-free, engaging citizens thru Cheela Mela campaigns (where used clothes were converted into carry bags) and developed an app for tracking waste collection and segregation.

Our work under CWS in Bengaluru and Trichy taught us that while deep engagement is essential for inculcating the practice of source segregation in households, the sustenance of the practice requires a strong collection system, well capacitated municipal staff and close monitoring by the municipal supervisors. Thus focussing on building capacities and handholding the municipal staff to carry out awareness and monitoring is bound to lead to better results in the long run.



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MOMENT 13

Ecosystem Strengthening

2022–present · Multi-state
Swachhata Knowledge Partner, MoHUA

While India possesses very progressive solid waste management rules, a significant implementation gap exists due to a widespread knowledge gap among municipalities and rural local bodies. As part of our implementation projects, Saahas team was building capacities of the different stakeholders involved in setting up and managing the SWM system, but we had not executed large-scale, well-designed capacity building programs beyond our geographical coverage. We took an important step in this direction when Saahas established a dedicated Capacity Building Vertical in 2022 to use the learnings from our on-ground implementations to the wider ecosystem.

Recognising that a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not work, Saahas designs customised, action-oriented training modules tailored to the distinct roles of diverse stakeholders, including elected representatives, government officials, sanitation staff, ASHA and Anganwadi workers, and self-help groups (SHGs). Moving away from traditional classroom lectures, the vertical conducts participatory training sessions augmented by on-site demonstrations, exposure visits, mentoring, and continuous hand-holding to foster permanent institutional change.

As a testament to our multi-state impact, Saahas was empanelled by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs as a Swachhata Knowledge Partner, enabling us to scale our modules to national, state, and district-level workshops. Saahas is also an active member of the Rural WASH Partner's Forum established by the Jal Shakti Ministry for implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission- Grameen.









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MOMENT 14

Greening the Jungles

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB) probably has the highest recall value among the tourism departments of all the Indian states because of the extremely popular advertising campaigns they have launched over the years. Remember the breathless pace of “Hindustan ka dil dekho” and the beautiful hand shadow puppetry in “*MP gajab hai, sabse alag hai*”. So when we got an opportunity to work with the MPTB and the Coca-Cola Foundation in the buffer zone of the Panna Tiger Reserve, we were quite thrilled!

Not only was this our first opportunity to work in an eco-sensitive region, it also presented us with the new challenge of working with multiple state departments like the Department of Forests, the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, the Tourism Board, the Swachh Bharat Mission team and the office of the District Collector and Zilla Panchayat. At the start of the Clean Destinations project of MPTB, under its Responsible tourism initiative, we carried out a detailed baseline assessment of the 30 villages in the buffer zone, the existing solid waste management practices, mapped the different types of waste generators and carried out a Knowledge, Attitude and Practices survey among the key stakeholders.



This gave us a good idea of where to start and how to build a model which could be replicated across the other reserve forests of the state. Over the course of three years, we were successful in setting up village level storage units, starting regular door-step collection of waste through the Gram Panchayats, setting up a centralized dry waste processing unit to aid the dry waste value chain and engaging the homestays and resorts in the program. The biggest success has been the inclusion of a waste management cess in the entry fee to the Panna Tiger Reserve by the Forest Department, the ownership of the waste collection system by the Gram Panchayats and setting up of a district level committee to monitor the operations of the centralized facility in Panna.

The model is being replicated in the villages around a larger tiger reserve, the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Umaria district which has a higher tourist footfall and larger number of resorts. We are seeing equally encouraging results in terms of onboarding the resorts to pay user fees to the Gram Panchayats and willingness of the Gram Panchayats to take ownership of running the waste collection and processing systems. We are working with the MPTB to institutionalize the model and replicate it in other national parks and tiger reserves of Madhya Pradesh, so we can proudly say that '*MP gajab hai, sabse ajab hai*' even when it comes to how waste is managed in its tourist places.



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MOMENT 15

The North-East Frontier

2023–present · Assam
With the State SBM-U team and Janaagraha

We had been wanting to work in the North East since 2018, mainly because the pace of implementation of holistic SWM systems was extremely slow and there was a huge gap in the capacities of the key stakeholders.

We got an opportunity to initiate work in Assam when a colleague wanted to move from Bengaluru to his hometown Jorhat, and a funder accepted our proposal to work in Jorhat city. In 2023, we started working towards Jabor Mukta Jorhat, with a completely locally hired team. Our footprint in Assam grew with the addition of Majuli as a new intervention area. Majuli is the largest river-island and had practically no waste management system resulting in even high-value waste like PET bottles not reaching the scrap dealer network in the mainland. Once again, with a completely locally hired and highly motivated staff, we started the process of assessing the gaps in the current system and leveraging the existing infrastructure to set up systems for segregation, collection and processing in the 20 Gram Panchayats of the Island. After successful piloting of our interventions in the villages in the buffer zone of the Panna Tiger Reserve, we began replicating the model in Kaziranga National Park in 2025. Kaziranga National Park was facing a huge crisis of mismanaged waste, due to the lack of systems in the villages and a high tourist footfall.



Saahas has signed a MOU with the State SBM-U team and Janaagraha to support the 10 cities of the Doh Shaher Ek Rupayan program in improving their solid waste management systems and aligning them with the SWM Rules 2026. We plan to continue to scale our rural and urban interventions in Assam to 12 districts in the state by building capacities of the Government and providing handholding support. We hope that our efforts in Assam will result in generating local livelihoods and laying the foundation for scaling the recycling ecosystem in North-East India.



MOMENT 16

Circonomy: Circular Economy in Schools

16



Most people still think circular economy is a fancy word for recycling or waste management. The fact that a circular economy is much more than keeping the flow of materials by closing the recycling loop is something even grown ups are not familiar with. So what prompted us to create a playbook for Circular Economy in Schools, Circonomy 101?

We believe that concepts embedded in a child's mind earlier on in their lives have a long-lasting impact in their lives. If using a water bottle throughout middle school is made cooler than buying a new one every year, or wearing a hand-me-down uniform of their siblings is seen as a badge of honour and not something to be ashamed of, these behaviours can be more easily adopted and sustained as the child grows up. To make students think beyond waste as a dry and boring subject which they need to understand just to clear the questions asked in their exams, we wanted to create a guidebook which will provide students insight into the basic principles of circular economy in a fun and engaging manner. We used pedagogical insights and inputs for circular economy experts to come up with the content and flow of the guidebook and designed the graphics keeping in mind the target audience. While finalizing the content, we shared the draft with a few schools and carried out the activities with the students to gather feedback from the ground. This resulted in the Circonomy 101, our first-of-its-kind, activity-based guidebook on Circular Economy for schools.

We hope that the concepts introduced in the Circonomy 101 will find place in the school curriculum and will nudge the future generations to adopt the principles of reduce, reuse, repair not only in their lives but in their professional careers as well.





MOMENT 17

17

Managing waste at Bangalore's Key landmark- Lalbagh Botanical Garden

Lalbagh is a more than 250 year old botanical garden in the heart of Bengaluru and houses one of India's largest collections of tropical and subtropical plants. As an urban green space along with Cubbon Park, it is also home to numerous wild species of birds and other wildlife. The garden also has a lake adjoining a large rock on which a watchtower had been constructed during the reign of Kempegowda II. It is managed by the Department of Horticulture.

2006–present · Lalbagh, Bengaluru
With the Department of Horticulture and HSBC

It hosts two flower shows coinciding with the week of Republic Day (26 January) and Independence Day (15 August) every year. Saahas has been involved with the waste prevention and management at the Lalbagh since 2006.

In 2006, Saahas, in association with the **Horticultural Department, Karnataka and HSBC,** set up a dry waste sorting station in Lalbagh. All the waste generated in the botanical garden is brought into the sorting station where it is further segregated and then sent out to recyclers. A composting facility was also set up under this program.

The Lalbagh park was declared a **plastic free zone** through our persistent efforts of engagement and awareness programs. Over the past couple of decades, Annual Flower Show organised on Independence Day and Republic Day has become a key part of Saahas's work in Bengaluru. The flower shows have a footfall of 8-10 lakh visitors with the figure increasing every year. The waste generation has also increased from 8-10 MT to 40-50 MT over the last 10 years.

Every year, we support the Horticulture Department in ensuring that the flower shows do not generate non-recyclable waste, littering is reduced, the public bins are cleared at regular intervals and waste taken to the right end destination. We engage volunteers to ensure littering is reduced, and monitor the collection staff to ensure the bins are cleared regularly so they don't overflow and spoil the visual cleanliness of the park. Food zones are defined and vendors trained to not use single-use plastics.

Our efforts, with no external funding and driven by the Saahs team in collaboration with volunteers of Bengaluru, have been appreciated by the Horticulture Department and visitors continue to enjoy the #litterfreelalbagh experience every year.





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MOMENT 18

Beyond MSW: Construction & Demolition waste

With growing awareness of waste recycling, many citizens would like to dispose their C&D waste in a responsible manner, but lack the information about whom to contact and how to get their waste disposed. While many cities have some form of collection system for the regular solid waste, most don't have any process to address the C&D waste generated during renovation or demolition.

2022–2025 · Bengaluru & Gurugram

“Circular Realty” was a pilot undertaken by Saahas from 2022 to 2024 to address the growing need for safe disposal of Construction & Demolition (C&D) waste, especially from non-bulk generators. The C&D Rules were studied, an authorized recycler was onboarded and the pilot was initiated in South Bengaluru which was close to the location of the recycling plant. Regular awareness events were conducted in residential societies about the need to plan for segregation of the C&D waste at source while carrying out renovation activities, and how they could engage with an authorised recycler to dispose the waste. The pilot demonstrated that the waste generators were willing to pay the required service fee if they were assured that the waste was being taken to an authorised end destination, and highlighted that for maximum resource recovery, source segregation of C&D waste was as important as municipal solid waste. The pilot also showed that while most of the construction material like concrete and masonry, metal rods and electrical cables were recyclable, the ceramic tiles and sanitary ware could not be recycled in small-scale recycling plants. Wood also turned out to be a difficult-to-dispose item with very few buyers except those who wanted to take it for energy conversion..

In Gurugram, Bin Malba was a pilot initiated in 2025 to provide a safe disposal option for residential societies to the authorised C&D recycler. The objectives included building awareness across municipal officials, Resident Welfare Associations, waste collection agencies and civil contractors; streamlining the collection system to divert the C&D waste to authorised recycler instead of being dumped and strengthening the regulatory framework. The learnings from these pilots were submitted in the form of a recommendation report to the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram

Scan the QR code link to the report.









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MOMENT 19

Moving the big items - Bulky Waste Management

Having worked on the e-waste awareness and collection program, bE-Responsible, in Bengaluru, Saahas developed good connects with a number of residential societies who were keen to follow the right practices with regard to waste disposal.

2023–24 · Bengaluru

So when we started the pilot for C&D waste collection, we started our awareness campaign with the same set of societies who we had onboarded for bE-Responsible and slowly added more societies under our campaign coverage. During interactions with the residents, we understood that there were some other waste streams beyond regular MSW, e-waste and C&D which they were finding difficulty in safely disposing. This category, which mostly covered mattresses, unused furniture, commodes, textiles, toys, books etc. was defined as bulky waste in bye-laws of Bengaluru city.

This led us to initiate a pilot to study the collection and disposal of bulky waste in Bengaluru in 2023. The objective was to understand the difficult categories of waste under this stream, find appropriate end destinations and an efficient collection and aggregation model. ‘Change Matters’ was our pilot to find solutions to waste categories like clothes, mattresses, books, toys, furniture and other large items which we don't usually dispose along with regular solid waste.

As we started the collection drives for this waste category, it emerged that most of these categories don't necessarily need to be disposed as waste, many of the items could actually be reused either directly or with a little bit of repair. Over time, we could not only find end of life disposal options for these waste categories, we were also able to find second hand buyers for many of these waste streams. However, we found used furniture to be one of the most difficult items to dispose, mainly because of the mix of textiles, sponge, wood, metal which were difficult to disassemble and separate.

This pilot showed us that life extension and reuse is the best option for many of the items we use in daily life and possibly a one a month collection drive for these items would prevent them from being dumped on roadside and water bodies. The Greater Bengaluru Authority launched the Decluttr app for pick up of bulky waste on the lines of our Change Matters pilot.







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MOMENT 20

Repair – Making it Viable and Convenient

While working on the Change Matters pilot in 2023-24, we found that many of the items households were discarding as unusable were actually in fairly good condition and could be used for a longer time, if repaired.

We had also seen similar instances while doing e-waste collection. Repair is a key component of a circular economy as it results in life extension of products leading to delay in extraction of virgin materials.

In 2024, without any external funding support, we started organizing repair campaigns in the residential societies where we were doing bulky waste collection. We started by bringing cobblers, tailors, knife sharpeners, cycle repair vendors into the residential societies on a fixed day where they would be stationed for the entire day. We called the campaign 'Repair Maadi', meaning 'Come, Repair' in Kannada. We got a very good response from the residents, especially the children. They turned out in large numbers to repair their bicycles and toys. But the star of almost every Repair Maadi event turned out to be the knife sharpener, with the most number of items repaired and highest earnings! By 2025, Repair Maadi became RRR Maadi, a funded project where we organised 3-4 repair campaigns every month. Gradually Repair Melas have become an integral part of our community engagement activities across all our projects, and they invariably draw a huge crowd, showing that we still hold repair and life extension close to our hearts.

Apart from events in residential societies, we also organise an open house on the International Repair Day every year where residents of Bengaluru come and try their hands on activities related to textile upcycling, learning DIY repair skills, making products from used furniture, doing electrical repairs, debugging laptops and computers etc. This flagship annual event also includes talks and panel discussions related to fostering the repair economy in the country. We hope to take our repair related work beyond behaviour change to upskilling of the repair technicians and improving their accessibility and quality of the repairs in the years to come.





MOMENT 21

21

Cycle of Change: Sustainable Menstrual Hygiene

Openly discussing menstruation is still a taboo in most parts of India. Even in some of the most progressive spaces, like International sporting events where women represent their countries, the discussion on women's training and performance while menstruating is still not discussed openly. So for a male Field Supervisor to be able to talk about sustainable menstruation with women in a village committee meeting is indeed a bold step. Saahas teams have been talking about sustainable menstruation for years, the response in most cases has been positive. In an atmosphere of trust, women are more than willing to discuss the challenges surrounding menstruation and adopting sustainable menstrual products like cups and reusable pads.

For many years, awareness about the harmful effects of single use disposable sanitary pads and promotion of sustainable alternatives was a part of Saahas's interventions in urban and rural areas. Buoyed by the success of our smaller interventions on sustainable menstruation, we initiated a standalone program specifically focussing on reducing sanitary waste in Hyderabad in 2024. With a small but highly motivated team of two young women, we started the initiative **'Cycle of Change'** which engages communities through workshops and dialogues to address the stigma surrounding menstruation, improve menstrual health awareness, and encourage environmentally responsible practices. Through this integrated approach, Cycle of Change addresses both waste reduction and the adoption of sustainable menstrual hygiene practices.

The initiative addressed young menstruators in colleges, women doing fieldwork like sanitation staff, ASHA and Anganwadi workers, teachers and residents of residential societies in Hyderabad. Apart from in-person sessions, mass media promotion was carried out through jingles played during intermission in PVR Cinemas, podcasts in a popular FM channel and through social media influencers.

The initiative was supported by Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) and with the Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA). The awareness sessions were supported, in some cases, by distribution of the sustainable products to menstruators who showed interest in trying them out. Overall we achieved an adoption rate of 40% and with good success in sustenance of the usage. The testimonials from young menstruators were extremely encouraging, and they went on to become influencers in their circles.

In order to help menstruators through the process of adoption and sustenance in the use of menstrual cups, a WA chatbot and a QR code we launched to answer the FAQs. This initiative gave us confidence that while working on end-of-pipe waste management is important, it is equally important to demonstrate how waste can be reduced by switching to multi-use products instead of single-use.

Scan the QR code for WhatsApp Chatbox



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MOMENT 22

Circular Campuses – Waste to Biogas to Cooking Fuel

2018–present · Osmania University, Hyderabad
With university partners and CSR support

We had been installing decentralised biogas systems in different types of waste generator premises since 2018. After experimenting with biogas units for dhabas, Anganwadis, community kitchens, RWAs and municipal waste, we found that the best use case for small capacity biogas units was a place where there was sufficient amount of food waste which could be used for heating/cooking in the same campus. This would be most efficient in terms of the distance of transportation of waste and the utilization of energy from the generated gas.

A university campus with hostels turned out to be an ideal match for this, where the waste from the hostel mess could be used in the kitchens for cooking. It was not easy though to convince the university management to allocate a place, plan for the civil works and funds for the capex, and convince the kitchen staff to operate the plant. After unsuccessful attempts at onboarding a few University campuses, we were approached by a Professor from the Osmania University, Hyderabad to support setting up of a biogas unit in their campus. Osmania University is a 107-year-old institution with a large verdant campus. The campus is home to ~12000 students and scholars and ~4000 staff members. To manage the wet waste from the hostel complex in the university campus, the university was keen to set up a biogas plant where the gas could be used in one of the hostel kitchens. The plant was successfully set up in Nov 2025 and has been operational since then. This model demonstrates a closed-loop system with savings in LPG being used by the kitchens along with saving in the waste disposal cost.

Similar plants are also being set up in Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak and Vijnana Jyothi Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, with infrastructure cost being shared by the Universities and the CSR grant. Over the last few years, we have tried out solutions of different sizes from different OEMs. We strongly believe that testing the biogas technology of different technology providers, in different climatic conditions and with different types of feed will help us document the necessary changes in design and operation models which the OEMs can incorporate to provide fail-proof solutions to the thousands of university campuses across the country.



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MOMENT 23

Growing Rural Footprint – Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh

A leap of faith that took Saahas's rural model to Gujarat and beyond.

2018–present · Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh
With CLP India and Atul Foundation

After testing our solutions for rural waste management in the villages of Karnataka, in 2018 we started working in 2 Gram Panchayats of Bharuch Dist, Gujarat. Like JSW Foundation, with whom we partnered in Ballari district of Karnataka, CLP India was also actively working in the villages around their plant and wanted to add solid waste management to their offerings in the villages. Although we had started working outside Karnataka in 2017 with Alag Karo in Gurgaon, starting a project in rural Gujarat was a big step for us. But going by Wilma's dictum of not saying no to opportunities aligned with our vision, we went ahead and accepted the challenge.

Working in Bharuch was not easy, the villages were very remote, it was difficult to hire a team to work there and getting a buy-in from the Panchayat members was a struggle initially. We send one of our most experienced team members to spend 3 months in Bharuch, hire and train the local team, and build connections with the local stakeholders. The local team, supported by the CLP Foundation's team, took off from there, and achieved a modest level of success. The work in Bharuch led us to work with the Atul Foundation in Valsad, Gujarat, and with support from Saahas, the Atul Foundation has built its own capacities to scale the work on its own in 75 Gram Panchayats in the district.

This is how our journey in working in villages outside Karnataka started, with a leap of faith and the confidence that we will find aligned partners and motivated youngsters willing to work in their homelands. Very soon we were working in multiple states and districts outside Karnataka, like Pune, Alwar, Nuh, Kota, Lucknow and Unnao. This helped us understand the different institutional structures in these states, the cultural and social differences, the different local supply chains and readiness of the government officials in setting up the right kind of SWM systems. We could come up with localised solutions suitable for the respective geographies, and strengthen our own knowledge of what it takes to set up successful rural waste management systems by leveraging the Government systems and schemes.





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MOMENT 24

Expanding in South – Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh

2020–present · Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu
With UNICEF

Although we started working outside Karnataka in 2018, our interventions in rural areas of other states took a few more years. It was in the COVID year of 2020 that we started working in rural Telangana in partnership with UNICEF. This involved setting up well-functioning systems in 6 Gram Panchayats in two districts of Telangana and scaling the learnings in the other Panchayats of the districts through train-the-trainer model. We also shared draft policy, strategy and bye-laws with the state of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh under this partnership.

Since 2020, we have also worked in the 3 mandals of Siddipet district of Telangana state all of whom have shown very good adoption. In Andhra Pradesh, we piloted Gram Panchayat level interventions in Anantpur and Chittoor districts.

In Tamil Nadu, we worked in the Thiruvallur district which is close to the capital city of Chennai. Working in the 4 southern states showed us how different the institutional structure and approach to solid waste management was in these states. While in AP and Telangana, the multi-purpose staff available with the Gram Panchayats were being used to do door to door collection and vermi-composting, in Karnataka it was a mix of SHG-led collection or by sanitation staff deployed by the Gram Panchayats. Karnataka also took the lead in training women to drive the collection vehicles and work at the processing units. AP and Telangana had set up composting sheds many years back which had slowly become defunct, hence allocation of land and infrastructure was not a problem there, unlike in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. One of our largest capacity building programs was carried out in the state of Andhra Pradesh in partnership with the WASH Institute, which has given us further insights into the institutional structures, key enablers and barriers for implementing SWM in the state. The learnings from our work in the southern states are extremely valuable as we scale up our work to cover more regions across the country.



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MOMENT 25

Leadership over the years

Most NGOs struggle with leadership transition beyond the founder, however Saahas has seen **two seamless transitions** over the years, moving the baton without any hiccups. Saahas has been helmed by **three women** leaders with distinct leadership styles that coincidently aligned with the organization's evolving institutional needs over a quarter of a century.



Photo: Wilma, Divya & Archana together



Photo: Wilma Rodrigues

Wilma Rodrigues

FOUNDER · 2001–2014

Wilma Rodrigues founded Saahas in 2001, when most people thought of waste as something to be removed from sight. She saw that waste could not simply be wished away. Its rapidly growing volume demanded ways to recycle and recover resources and, more importantly, ways to reduce how much was generated in the first place.

Besides the struggles of starting a new organisation, she was fighting several battles at once: persuading people to take responsibility for their waste footprint, getting the administration to allocate budget and space for resource- recovery facilities instead of dumping everything in landfills, and convincing funders that waste management was a cause worth supporting. The hardest part was finding people to work in a sector that was not seen as a respectable vocation.

It took courage and belief to keep going against those odds, and that is what Wilma personifies: never giving up, beginning every day with renewed hope in people and an unwavering belief that every effort counts. She was open to collaboration and brought everyone along, yet was just as willing to carry on alone when others wavered. Saahas and Wilma became synonymous, and she became an ambassador for the cause of sustainable waste management.

She always put real work ahead of theory and pioneered many initiatives, above all the demand that waste management be treated as an essential service, like water and electricity. Convinced that waste could only be managed well by professionals with a business model, she established Saahas Waste Management Private Limited in 2013 to offer waste management services as a business.



Photo: Divya Tiwari

Divya Tiwari

CEO · 2014–2021

In 2014, Wilma handed the NGO's reins to Divya Tiwari, so that both organisations would have full-time leadership, each with its own clear path. The business focused on professionalising waste management; the NGO focused on building the ecosystem and developing solutions where no business model yet existed.
Divya, an engineer with a PhD in Supply Chain Management and more than a decade of consulting experience, brought a strong problem-solving lens. Her

tenure coincided with rapid expansion, triggered by the national launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rules. As waste finally won the attention of citizens and administrations, funding improved, and so did Saahas's ambition. The organisation tried new initiatives, grew beyond Bengaluru and into rural areas, and moved from small community projects to city-wide programmes. Working across 12 states and new waste streams such as e-waste and construction and demolition (C&D) waste brought fresh learnings, and with them the realisation that capturing and sharing this knowledge was essential to spreading the ideas of sustainable waste management.

Archana Tripathi

CEO · 2021–PRESENT

In 2021, Divya moved on to establish the Knowledge vertical and passed the baton to Archana Tripathi, then COO. An Electronics and Electrical Engineer from IIT Kanpur, Archana had spent almost two decades at C-DOT and brought deep experience of leading large teams and building processes and systems.

After years of rapid growth, Saahas needed to strengthen itself from within. As CEO during this phase of institutional maturity, Archana standardised its offerings, streamlined internal processes and restructured the organisation around its strategic goals, establishing key departments such as Data and Quality Assurance, Capacity Building and Partnerships. This internal strength also lifted Saahas's external outreach and collaboration. Now seen as a veteran of the sector, Saahas grew its advocacy and policy work significantly under Archana, and its funding partnerships deepened, making room for strategic interventions rather than transactional work.



Photo:Archana Tripathi

As Archana steers Saahas into the future, Wilma, as a Board member, and Divya, as an Advisory Board member, continue to play active roles in shaping the organisation's journey.

Awards & Recognition

A quarter century, acknowledged.

Recognition was never the goal, but it has been a welcome sign that the work is landing. Forums across India and the Asia-Pacific have acknowledged Saahas, the projects we run on the ground and the partners who make them possible.

04



FEATURED AWARD

3R National Level Excellence Award

Our efforts were also rewarded by recognition from the 3R Asia Pacific Forum who awarded us the **3R National Level Excellence Award** in FY 2017-18

Sahaas bagged the first prize in the 3R Excellence Awards for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) under the National Level Category, at the 8th Regional 3R Forum in Asia and Pacific. This award was given for exemplary work in the area of Waste Management through 3R (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle). The award was presented at the 8th Regional 3R Forum in Asia and Pacific held from 9 to 12 April 2018, in the cleanest city of India, Indore. The 3R Awards are organised jointly by MoHUA, Ministry of Environment, Japan, and the Nations Centre for Regional Development to commemorate exceptional work in waste management across the country. Saahas emerged as the winner for its inspiring work in Bangalore, Hubballi, Ballari, Chennai, and Gurugram.

Recognition across the years

FOR SAAHAS



01 Winner of **FICCI's Indian Circular Economy Award 2019** under the category Not for Profit.



02 Selected as runner up in the Unsung Hero - Waste Management by Indian Biogas Association



03 Our founder Wilma Rodrigues was a Finalist (top 5) for Entrepreneur of the Year 2022 by Jubilant Bhartiya Foundation



04 Saahas was awarded the CSR Excellence in Sustainable Environment category at the India CSR & Sustainability Conclave 2023 organized by BrandsGlobal Media



05 Saahas was recognized as one of the five awardees in the category of NGO Leadership at the 10th edition of National CSR Leadership Congress and Awards 2023 organized by World CSR Day.



06 Saahas was awarded during the **Green Impact Awards**, Gurugram for its contribution to the city. The event was curated and executed by **Kalagram, an initiative of the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram and The Gurugram District Administrative** to promote art and culture in the city.

07 Saahas was recognised at the **Swachhta Samman Samaroh, MP**. This award was conferred to Panna for its outstanding performance in Swachh Survekshan 2024, where the city made remarkable progress—rising from the 750th position in Swachh Survekshan 2023 to an impressive 62nd rank at the national level, earning the title of "Fastest Mover City.



08 Winner of the **Delhi Icon Award for Excellence** under the category of **E-Waste Awareness and Management**, presented by **Radio City**.

FOR OUR PROJECTS



09 Winner of 6th CSR Impact Awards 2019 under "WASH – Small Projects" category at the **CSRBOX India CSR Summit 2019** for project Alag Karo



10 6th e-NGO challenge 2019-2020 under the category Environment and Sustainability organised by **Digital Empowerment Foundation and WhatsApp** for the Kasa Kiosk, Bengaluru Project



11 Best Practices in CSR Award 2020 under the category of **Environmental Sustainability** organized by **the** Center for CSR, Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad for the Ashakirana, Orohalli Project

12 ORG Impact Award 2020 (Finalist - Top 5) under the category of **Advancing Environmental Sustainability,** organized by **Public Interest Registry (PIR)** for the project **Swachha Sundara Namma Bidar**

Recognition across the years



13 **7th e-NGO Challenge 2020-2021** under the category Environment and Sustainability organised by the Digital Empowerment Foundation for the Mission Sunehra Kal, Bengaluru Project



14 Winner of **VIth edition of HCL Grant under Environment category**

15 Our intervention in Bengaluru Urban Dist was the finalist under 'Environment & Sustainability Agriculture' category in eNGO Challenge Awards 2022

16 Our project, **Swachh Jeevan** was recognized under the **Environmental Sustainability** category at the **Indian CSR & Sustainability Conclave 2023**, celebrating its impactful contributions to sustainable development.



17 Our project, **Sampurna Swachhta Abhiyan, Karoda** received the **Special Jury Appreciation Award** in the *Small Category* at the **6th ICC Social Impact Awards 2024** under the **Clean Water & Sanitation** segment



18 **"Unnati - Solid Waste Management Program"**, funded by Roop Automobiles in partnership with Saahas in Rozka Meo, Nuh has been honored with the BRONZE Award at the **CSR TIMES AWARD 2024**



19 Saahas under Project **Cycle of Change** won the award **Best Practices in Menstrual Hygiene Management** award by **Gramalaya**

WITH OUR PARTNERS



20 HDB Financial Services (HDBFS) won the '**Best CSR Impact Award**' at the 5th Edition of Corporate Social Responsibility & Summit 2022, hosted by UBS Forums in Gurugram in recognition of its contribution towards introducing efficient & sustainable Waste Management practices in Udupi, Karnataka. This project was implemented by Saahas



21 CGI was declared winner of **ASSOCHAM CSR & Sustainability Award 2022** in the category **Excellence in Waste Management** for **our biogas based projects** funded by them



22 **Doing Good for Bharath by CSRBOX** won by **Hyundai Motor India Ltd** for **EcoGram - Centre for Sustainable Solutions**

23 **ACEF Asian Business Leadership Award- Won by Hyundai Motors India Ltd for Ecogram, under the Environmental Sustainability Award category.**

24 **Anandana Foundation**, our partner, awarded the **Global ESG Award 2024** for *Best Solid Waste Management Project* of the Year, with Saahas as the implementing partner driving sustainable waste management solutions

25 **Global ESG Award 2024 for Coca-Cola's Anandana Foundation for "Panna National Park Waste Management" under best SWM project of the year for Clean Destination Panna project.**



26 **MP Tourism has won the Skoch Award for Clean Destination- Panna**

Looking Ahead

If waste is segregated at source, it is a resource.

For 25 years Saahas has shown how India's waste rules can work on the ground. With new rules in force, the question is no longer how, but how quickly.

05

2001

Founded in response to India's first Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules of 2000

~90%

Resource recovery from municipal waste, demonstrated through source segregation

1 April 2026

New SWM Rules come into effect as Saahas completes 25 years

50 · 5

Circularity clusters planned across 50 districts in 5 states over the next five years

Saahas was founded in the year 2001 in response to the first ever Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules for the country, which were released in the year 2000. The purpose was to demonstrate how the Rules can be implemented on the ground, and solve for the challenges that will need to be overcome for large-scale implementation. And for 25 years we have done just that. We have picked up real life problems ailing the cities and villages as they go about implementing source-segregation based SWM systems, partnered with a diverse set of ecosystem players and demonstrated how it is possible to have resource recovery from almost 90% of the municipal waste. Together we have shown that if waste is segregated at source, it is a resource.

We started with a 'Less Plastic for Me' campaign in Bangalore, continued to work on decentralised composting and dry waste sorting systems, and expanded our work by adding waste streams like e-waste, construction & demolition waste and bulky waste. We experimented in different geographies, places with different levels of urbanization, different socio-economic -cultural-political scenarios and different waste generator profiles. The objective always being to align the solutions within the ambit of the Solid Waste Management Rules and to maximise the recovery of resources from waste. Along with demonstrating the solutions, we also worked on understanding the larger ecosystem and the systemic barriers, and finding ways to overcome some of them.

Over the years as we worked across urban, rural and eco-sensitive geographies, one feeling that remained constant has been that "the more things change, the more they remain the same" (Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, 1849). While the sector has seen the evolution of waste processing technologies, shift in community behaviour, better livelihoods for people working in waste, and improvements in capacities of the government bodies, a lot more needs to change for the country to get rid of its solid waste mis-management. The nature of waste has changed, the penetration of packaging waste has reached the remotest parts of the country, local governments have a more diverse et of competing priorities, tourism sector has exploded and the markets have continued to focus only on a

small set of high value waste which is largely getting recovered through a large informal workforce.

As we complete 25 years in Oct 2026, a new set of SWM Rules have been released which are effective from 1st April 2026 and we find ourselves evolving once again in response to the changes in the ecosystem and the requirements of the Rules. The challenge once again is to show how the rules can be implemented, but this time the urgency is greater, and only a large-scale systemic adoption by the governance, community and market systems can solve the waste crisis we are facing.

Most of the things that are needed for implementation are known in theory, so the question no longer is 'how', but 'how quickly' can resource recovery based systems be scaled for long-term sustainability?. In keeping with the need and urgency for the implementation matching the scale of the problem, we have reworked our strategy. Over the next 5 years, we are ready to embark on a path of government-led scaled model which will demonstrate well functioning clusters of circularity across 50 districts in 5 states, both in urban and rural areas. This will build confidence in the nay-sayers who think source segregation, decentralization and recycling can succeed only on the fringes and can't be mainstreamed. We believe that adoption drives adoption, and many times people just need to see systems working at a large-enough scale to start believing in them.

Bulk waste generators have the potential to dramatically alter the waste mismanagement by adopting close loop circular practices within their premises. We will leverage this by promoting the adoption of small-scale close loop biogas systems in university and other campuses across the country. Keeping the waste hierarchy and circular economy principles in mind, we will also continue to work on improving the circular economy ecosystem, with a focus on Repair and Reuse. Children can influence the future in a big way, and form a key part of our strategy to build influencers of tomorrow through our education vertical. The vision is to embed basic principles of source segregation and waste reduction into the education curriculum; every child in India should know source segregation just like they know counting and the letters of the alphabet. And while we work on the different program verticals, we will also elevate the narrative around waste by codifying our learnings in the form of publications, highlight the key challenges and build consensus through dialogues and convenings, and work with other partners in the ecosystem for a future where Nothing is Waste.



25 YEARS OF SAAHAS | SAAHAS

Nothing is waste.

For 25 years, Saahas has worked towards a simple but ambitious vision: an India where nothing is waste. This book gathers the people, places and turning points of that journey, from one borrowed desk in Bengaluru to communities across 12 states.

SAAHAS

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