Cloth Is Not Charity

How Goonj Turned Urban Surplus Into Village Wages

GOONJ · NEW DELHI · 20+ STATES · RURAL INDIA







A processing centre. Everything here was somebody's surplus, and nothing is given away.

1999
founded by Anshu Gupta
who began with 67 pieces of cloth

3,500 t
of material handled a year
sorted, repaired and repurposed

20+
states reached
through village-led projects

2015
Ramon Magsaysay Award
to the founder, for the model itself

> Goonj does not treat any of the material as a donation. A village digs a well, repairs a road or cleans a pond, and the cloth, utensils and grain arrive as payment for that work.

The program is called Dignity for Work, and it inverts the usual order. The village decides what needs building. The work is done by the people who will use it. The urban surplus that would otherwise be thrown away becomes the wage.

Around it sit Not Just a Piece of Cloth, which turns offcuts into sanitary pads, School to School, which moves urban school kits into village classrooms, and Rahat, the disaster response that works the same way.

HOW YOU CAN ENGAGE

Processing centres take exposure visits and hands-on volunteer sessions: sorting, segregation, kit-making. Ask for a working shift, not a visit to look around.

Go and stand in it.

Goonj

Every sheet in this set points to a place you can visit: a sorting platform, a solarised health centre, a processing floor, a driving lesson. It is real work, and all of it is open to visitors.

WHERE TO GO



A Goonj processing centre

Sorting, repair and kit-making, where visitors work rather than watch.



A Dignity for Work village project

The well, the road or the pond the material paid for.



A collection camp in a city

The urban end, where the surplus is given up.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE ROOM

01 Goonj insists this is a wage, not a gift. Does the distinction change the outcome, or only the dignity of it?

02 The currency is other people's surplus. What happens to the model if urban consumption falls?

03 The village chooses the project. Which decisions in your own field are still made by the funder rather than the user?

WHAT WE RUN

Academic programs

Business, leadership, entrepreneurship, healthcare, technology, sustainability and culture. Immersions of 12 to 15 days built around one of them.

Faculty and dean cohorts

Site-based curriculum development with Indian universities, industry and state agencies.

Executive programs

Company visits, policy briefings and operator conversations, tailored to a sector.

Service learning programs

Working visits with non-profits, social enterprises and CSR partners, tailored to your group.

READS WELL WITH: CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK

16 Climate & Just Transition

12 Jugaad (frugal innovation)

SOURCES Goonj's own site and published history: founded 1999 by Anshu Gupta; Ramon Magsaysay Award 2015; more than 3,500 tonnes of material handled a year.