

## 10. Women Social Entrepreneurship - Challenges and Motivation: A Case Study on Green BUGS

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### Abstract

*This paper is a case study on GreenBUG, a social enterprise run by a woman, Ms. Jyothi Pahadsingh. This is an effort to cover the social impact being delivered by this venture towards alleviating plastic usage and at the same time empowering the underprivileged women.*

**Key Words:** *Social Entrepreneur, Environment Protection, Women empowerment.*

### Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has become a major topic in the past few years, seen as a complementary approach to nonprofit, business, and governmental contributions to, but what is it, exactly? Any organization that uses business methods to address a social or environmental problem in an innovative way.

The field has developed so quickly, and social entrepreneurs often find themselves so far ahead of existing funding or legal entity models, that support organizations have had little time to emerge. Only in the last few years have investors, universities, and networks formed to support the first wave of social entrepreneurs and train the next.

### Background

The social enterprise sector is ripe for realizing the multiplier effects of women's leadership: Women are more likely to hire other women, to focus on women beneficiaries, and to pass on their gains to female family members.

That's especially true in India, where nearly 25 percent of social enterprises are led by women. We need more women social entrepreneurs. Addressing this disparity calls for new approaches in gender-lens investing, which considers the impact of financial investments on women, and support for social enterprise. Founding a social enterprise is no small feat, and

women in India face the additional barriers of prejudice, discrimination, and family pressure. But those women who surmount these challenges find the outcome empowering. Becoming a social entrepreneur can also elevate a woman's status in her family and community. In the British Council Survey 2016, 47 percent of women social entrepreneurs reported increased respect within their families, compared to only 29 percent of their male counterparts. This form of empowerment was particularly significant for entrepreneurs from less-privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

### **The GreenBUG's Initiative**

Most people today are environment conscious, but struggle to be earth-friendly due to a lack of practical and affordable alternatives. GreenBUG's aim is to make things easier for people to make the switch. People hate to use plastic bags if they are ecofriendly. The plastic bags are disaster as they do not decompose in the soil. Hence, GreenBUG provides a liner for the dustbins which are neither leaking nor messy in the kitchen or in the office.

There is just the regular sized GreenBUG bag. For standard sized bins, the regular GreenBUG works pretty well. Due to its flexible design it fits quite well. It's about 13" tall, has a mouth perimeter of over 90 cm, expands to a volume of about 10 litres, and can hold over 2kg dry load. It is adequate for the average family's daily requirement.

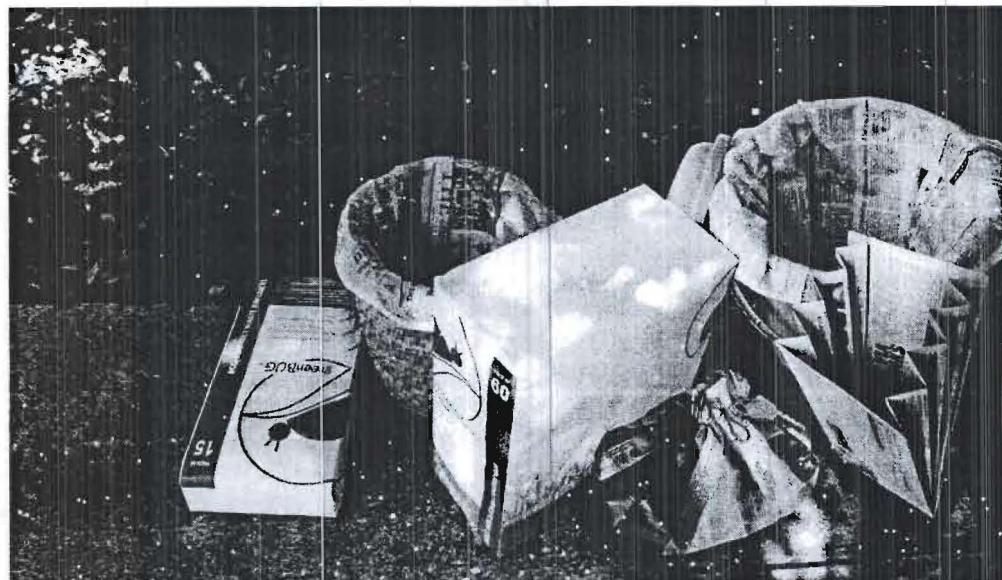
The GreenBUG dustbin liner is made up of discarded newspaper, starch glue. No other material, electricity, fuels; chemicals are used to manufacture the liner.

Their products are made by hand, painstakingly by the underprivileged women. GreenBUG has maintained consistently high-quality product from its inception. The product is made by some awesome women, who have overcome the limitations of their circumstances (disadvantaged, homebound) to learn how to make it, and earn a significant supplement to their family income.





*(Women working for Green Bug getting trained and empowered)*



*(The variants of products made by the women working and trained by GreenBUG)*



**Discussion**

The initiative was an idea of Ms. Jyothi Pahadsingh and Mr. Arun, which evolved from their own challenges with usage of plastic for waste disposal. The project initially started as home based and then soon grew popular in the neighborhood. As Jyothi puts it *"When the reach was limited we could work with our resources and no much constraints."* But as it grew they needed more people to produce the products. The products are not typical shopping bags or grocery bags but they are called as tote Bags or Rumali bags. The bags are soft which fit into the pocket and can be carried on travel. The bag can hold up to 15-16 Kgs of weight at a time. The customer can buy books or fashionable clothes which are easily held in the bag, or cycling and buying grocery with an equal comfort it can be held in the bag. The bags can be washed too, there are no chemicals that are added while manufacturing. The bags remain softer and are stronger in spite being washed. Dustbin bag and Rumali bag both were manufactured and brought out in the market at the same time. The founders struggled a lot to bring out the perfect product in the market. The use of newspaper gave solution to leaking making it a reliable alternative to regular dustbin bags. The bag went through a multiple testing with sides not leaking, liquid waste not getting absorbed and was tested in the houses of few friends and relatives. Ultimately, once convinced it was approved by everyone in the family circle.

Initially powerful steps were taken to sort out the problem of not using plastic, and not to start a venture or idea as such. Once they tried solving the problem, they saw that there was market interest from friends, family and their neighbors. This is when they felt that women can be trained, engaged and employed to make this bags at their homes.

**Why Women to make these ecofriendly substitutes?**

Initially, the idea was Arun's and Jyothi also shared the same piece of thought involving women into this project. *"Let's say that if you give the money to the women in the family then the entire rupee goes for the family. Keeping that in mind we started employing women from the underprivileged level of the society. Any women able to earn something for the family is women empowerment. Irrespective of what they earn or how much they earn, they develop a sense of financial might and when they are able to save from the earning specially for their children they have an immense feeling of security and they feel strong."*

The reason why we have been growing from past 2.5 -3 years is because these women who are working for Green Bugs have started thinking for themselves and their families have started supporting them. It is they who have decided as to how they are going to work and it is heartening to see that they are coming up with their ideas towards productivity. At this place they are allowed to think for themselves.

With this vision in mind the founders tried to reach out to different villages around Madanpalli, but after sometime i.e within 6 months they realized that it is simply too much to handle because of the distance. The women they wanted to employ in proximity, so that GreenBUGs can motivate them, support them with raw materials and the supply chain. That's when the founders focused more on the urban areas, like the urban poor people specially located in Bangalore. They started reaching out to all the NGOs that were into empowering the women

GrenBugs not just trains the underprivileged women but also explains it's our engagement model. They make them aware on how these women can work and what they can do and then they are allowed to decide in what capacity they want to work. The women are not given any targets. There are few who work and deliver regularly almost like every week. But then there are also some who want to deliver every two weeks/three weeks. The only target that is set is that there should be atleast 250 bags made by them so that GreenBUGs can collect them

The average earnings of these women cannot be spotted but some earn 1000 rupees per month, but there are some women who earn 14000 to 15000 rupees per month. *"We have a woman who is with us from six months and earning 4000 per month"*. There is nothing called an average because they are the ones who decide. They decide the time, quantity and how much they can do.

Jyothi opines that, *"We may not have been able to solve their day to day challenges but, we have really done for them is give them a flexible employment unlike places where they have to work 9 to 5 else they lose their job. What we have done is make work easier for them to continue with their day to day commitments and at the same time earn a dignified income. This is an income avenue for them where they don't feel stressed out or feel exploited."*



### **Sustainability of the Business**

This actually started as a neighborhood project and people started reaching after hearing about this through Facebook. Then we put it in the neighborhood organic stores. Then we thought of commercializing this project and selling all over. It is self-sustainable as the attempt is not to sell a low cost product. The garbage bag might look like a simple one but quality wise it has a 10 point quality check. As a part of training to these women it is also shown to them, the process of selling the bags made by them and the importance of quality and consistency. If you pick up a bag and see it closely you would realize that each bag is 100% handmade.

The women engaged in this process can learn how to make a dustbin liner in 10 days. But for them to really establish and feel that yes they can do this takes around 5 to 6 weeks and that needs lot of supply support, motivation and support from the family. This entire hand holding from the team makes the women confident.

Definitely, the age variation does exist and it also affects their work. There are about 3 to 4 women who are older and able to sit on the ground and make the bags. But most of the women are in the age group of 20s, 30s, and 40s.

### **Role of Women Entrepreneur**

Arun the cofounder was better in supporting this venture, so it didn't make any difference there. But the point where Jyothi's presence really made an impact was when convincing the families of the women.

### **Importance of SEs in empowering Women**

Being a Social Entrepreneur Jyothi had to work like other businesses and make money, but the purpose was to circulate the earnings. At one end, GreenBUGs is giving a solution to the waste problem and ensuring that the plastic is being reduced. But to the other end, it is also helping to underprivileged women to earn a livelihood and try to live with dignity.

*"We feel that Social enterprises help in making things fall into place. Everything is inclusive but not a charity works. Because consumer will do charity work once, but if something that you offer has some value for them then they keep coming back. One set of the society keeps producing and earning owing to a wonderful product that is functional".*

### **Financial constraints**

The founders did face some financial constraints as they started running this from home. At that point it was pretty fine. But when it started growing then the overheads increased as they to pay for the warehouse, and then it is a least-cost, zero-profit kind of a product. Even getting used newspapers was difficult because they had to pay for them and at the same time give the papers to women at a subsidized rate. Getting the newspaper and delivering it to the women also needs to be paid for the transport. The biggest challenge was shipping. The team also needed to handle the logistics, Government tax. Where ever they planned to sell, online or in neighborhood market, or any flea market, package was need that is an added overhead. As the number of women increased, that is when they thought and treated these women as entrepreneurs and expected them to invest a small amount of 200 to 500 rupees. The amount did not matter to them as they can recover the money almost within a months' time. *"So we can say that we used a model of crowd funding. We also kept it open to the customers and we were surprised when we realized the lot of patrons had contributed to this. Challenges are always there, but we try to be creative irrespective of success or not"*

### **The ongoing Motivation**

So far marketing for the products of Greebugs has been through word of mouth. They got to be known as we were widely covered by newspapers across India. May be as this grows as a market requirement they would like to get digital. So far, whatever has been produced is being consumed. *"We are not going to be complacent to the marketing strategies. We are also working with 2 to 3 productivity tools, some of the companies are working with us for the design. We also plan to set it up in some places like a SHG model. We are also working on a couple of other product lines. Like some low cost products as also some higher cost product to balance the operational profits"*.

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