

**Title of the Project: 'Sankalp'- One undertaking, several outcomes**

**Country: India**

**Sponsoring College: International Students House, London**

**Students: Aparajita Singh from India studying at University of Westminster, London**

**Project Goals:**

Project Sankalp is a multi-outcome project that aims to empower women, sensitize gender issues, increase standard of health and hygiene and develop an eco-friendly mindset in the most impoverished rural areas of India by setting up a unique business venture for poor women to produce low cost sanitary napkins.

**Planning & Challenges:**

Planning began in June and mainly included selecting the right student volunteers, making a timeline and action point for the project, selecting the village for the project and creating a good network with government officials in order to overcome administrative and bureaucratic barriers. However, the first unanticipated problem came our way when we started the ground work on 25th July was the unpleasant discovery of the fact that the village that we had selected had no electricity coming in for the past 15 days. We had no choice but to find another village with regular electricity. Finally on 31st July after making a trip to almost ten villages under the guidance of local government authorities, we could find the ideal village for our project. After many negotiations, the local government was kind enough to allot one of the government halls in the village to site the machine and begin production. Having overcome the administrative and bureaucratic barriers, our team was now at a position to start executing the project.

**Execution:**

In early August, we organized the first health and hygiene awareness program in the village this was followed by another two events where we introduced the project and its core ideas. By mid-August we had the machine working, held an inauguration ceremony and conducted three consecutive days of training sessions which kick-started the sanitary napkin unit in the village. Looking back at the project it seems that there were hardly any problems in the second half of the project as I could easily identify with the villager both culturally and linguistically and also had the sufficient budget and existing networks for the project execution.

**Beneficiaries**

Project Sankalp being a multi-outcome project also has multiple beneficiaries. The initial beneficiaries have been the eight women of the self-help group who got an opportunity to become economically independent. For the first time in their lives, they now have a bank account and a regular income to support their families. Moreover, the project has also been very advantageous to the entire female community of the village by not only empowering them through the awareness programs but also making sanitary napkins both affordable and accessible to them. One of the 16-year-old girls in the crowd almost broke into tears and told us, "This is the most precious gift that I could ever wish for. Those

five days have always been the most dreadful days and every time I have cursed myself for being a girl... But now 'I am proud to be a girl'... Thank you".

### **Legacy**

Sustainability has been at the forefront of the project. Our partner institution, Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya has taken the responsibility to support the project by helping the Self-help group with accounting and finance management and also trained them through interactive learning modules to become ambassadors for promoting issues of menstrual health and hygiene in the nearby villages. Moreover, the local government has aimed to promote the project in more than 100 nearby villages through organizing workshops and interactive sessions. Moreover, I have personally made efforts to establish network with local NGO's working for women that regularly require sanitary napkins. This will help Project Sankalp to reach the market and take the business to greater heights.

I envision project Sankalp to become a successful, replicable model for women empowerment that would be adapted in many areas of not only India but also in other developing countries. Talking big but not unrealistically, project Sankalp is fulfilling UN development goals of women equality and environmental sustainability through local actions. I dream that this project is recognized by UN and other International Organizations as a model to achieve these goals worldwide.

### **Peace**

I believe peace is an atmosphere free of constraints'. Constraint whether political, cultural or economic stops fellow human beings from achieving their goals and also creates conflict. I believe this project fulfills this criterion by removing the constraints that held back rural women from fulfilling their potential. In the short term of a year or two; this project will empower the self-help group economically. Moreover, in the long term, Project Sankalp will remove all the taboos associated with menstruation and inspire other women with the idea of entrepreneurship and what it is to be 'economically independent and being empowered.'

### **Personal Development.**

This project has not only brought a change in the life of the villagers but also in developing my personal confidence. I have become a strong believer in the idea of 'small efforts lead to big changes'. My project though started in only one village of India with just eight women working on it, but it is bringing positive change in the lives of thousands of women in that region. Thus, 'We' young people should never stop ourselves from doing which might not look very mighty.

This project has been very valuable to me as I have been able to use my knowledge and education to bring positive change in the lives of women in my society. The most important thing that I have learnt is

'If you want to make a change; never think how to start and from where, all you need to do is: go there, give a head start and the rest will follow.'