



Fostering development Volunteerism

Urban-Rural through

In India, the post-pandemic phase caused the urban-rural divide to grow deeper than before. The containment of the pandemic and the treatment was handled differently in rural India, and even the recovery methods have been uneven compared to the urban regions. Since the availability of resources is higher, and with a belief that the development of the country happens only through urban areas, the recoupment of rural areas has been considerably slower. At IndiVillage, we spent a large part of the past pandemic year finding initiatives that would help reset rural India, and through an experience, we came to an understanding that volunteerism could play a key role in bridging this urban-rural gap.



How does volunteerism aid rural India?

India being the fastest-growing economy is home to **20%** of the world's youth population. Though a majority of the Indian population resides in rural India, the population distribution is highly uneven, as most of the youth migrate to urban regions to find work. This large void can be filled as rural India grows more through employment opportunities, but until then volunteerism could be a way to stitch the gap closer.

Rural India is home to a hub of entrepreneurship as **54.2 %** of the population is self-employed. Bringing more light to these initiatives through volunteer involvement helps the people of rural India recuperate from the pandemic faster and better. The knowledge gap that exists can also be bridged while the urban can gain varied perspectives through association in rural regions.

Employee volunteering program

For corporate institutions, an employee volunteering program is an effective way to involve their employees to give back to society. The process is simple: The corporate can partner with an NGO or a social enterprise, in a domain that aligns with its larger vision and goal and encourages its employees to dedicate a certain amount of time to activities that are chosen collectively by the corporate and NGO partners. They include ventures such as the building of school infrastructure, skill development and capacity building, financial literacy programs, and volunteering their time in schools. In India, Corporate Social Responsibility was legally mandated in 2014. Under Section 135 of the Indian Companies Act, companies with a certain turnover were required to donate 2% of their average net profit for the past three years to CSR organizations.

There are clear linkages to the benefits of employee involvement in the social sphere. A study by Harvard Business Review revealed that approximately 50% of the global millennial workforce wanted to work with companies that work towards a greater social goal or purpose. There are many proven benefits to employee volunteering programs that include greater job satisfaction, team building, capacity development, and skill-building.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, employee volunteering engagements have moved to an online forum. While the shift to an online platform has been difficult, there is a great need for various forms of volunteer support. During Samvāda: Dialogue for Impact, IndiVillage conversed with NGOs, iVolunteer, and Concern India Foundation that work extensively on achieving development goals through employee volunteering engagements.



Pre Pandemic Employee Engagements

Concern India Foundation, an NGO which works towards funding and capacity building of smaller grassroots organizations said that most companies were very keen on engaging employees for volunteering programs. “Over the years, we have received very positive feedback from both corporates and NGO partner organizations. It is a great team-building and capacity building activity for corporate groups and also very useful for NGO partners because employee volunteering provides additional manpower and financial support. Before the pandemic, we would reach out to our corporate partners and design an intervention based on their requirements in our primary domains: health, education, and community development.”

iVolunteer works in both individual volunteerism and employee volunteering also

follow a similar procedure. “We match employees with organizations based on the goals of the corporates and the needs of the organization. The programs are designed for employee engagements, along with the monitoring, and evaluation component and the logistics.”

Virtual Employee Volunteering Engagements

In the time of the pandemic, there has been a great need for any form of support, especially in rural communities. There was also a keen desire amongst individuals to give back and support disadvantaged groups. However, taking into account the need for social distancing and the safety of the volunteers, the shift to an online module was essential.

Concern India Foundation observed that designing an employee volunteer engagement was a tricky process. “The activities need to be for a certain period, and they need to be consistent. Since most office work structures moved online, people are facing a digital overload and may not even want to increase the already heavy screen time for activities like volunteering. Hence, we had to be very creative while moving forward with these activities. Education was an area of interest for corporate volunteers to help provide study materials for students during the pandemic. A very recent event that we had was that the volunteers from CISCO recorded audiobooks for differently-abled children to use in Bangalore”



iVolunteer too faced many challenges in moving employee engagements online. “We took some time to devise programs that could be done online and we also developed a portal which we could use to track employee activities and the amount of time dedicated for the task. We redirected many of our present employee engagements to education programs. One of the activities that we engaged employees in was recording audio files for stories which could be shared with children.”

Apart from domains such as education, the online medium has also proved to be an effective medium to address the challenges in the health space and give back to the frontline workers. “What we noticed was that there was a shift in the interest of the corporates. Many were keen to contribute to the domain of health especially during the pandemic. We had employees make videos giving thanks to frontline workers and making different kinds of gifts for them. We also engaged employees in making masks which were distributed amongst those in need.” said Concern India Foundation.

Whether online or offline, employee volunteering engagements have proven to be an effective way for corporates to train, incentivize, and retain employees.

What can be done next?

In a way, the pandemic has provided an opportunity for us to relook how we approach corporate volunteerism. With the shift to a digital medium, while the nature of engagement is different, it has the potential to be equally impactful. There are multiple forms of volunteer engagements that corporates and impact institutions can engage, to bridge the gap between rural and urban communities. From the employees mentoring rural workforce or rural youth to assisting in a child in education, the possibilities are endless. Engaging employees in volunteering work moves beyond the mandate of the Indian Companies Act and helps create socially conscious and responsible citizens.

If you want to collaborate with us or learn more about volunteering opportunities, please contact impact@indivillage.com.