

Strengthening Communities for a Prosperous India

As a large-scale financial institution, we have a responsibility of bringing about meaningful change within the different layers of society. We curate impactful initiatives that help inculcate resilience within communities by enhancing their knowledge, livelihoods and way of life. We work with people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, across rural and urban India, and contribute significantly to the nation-building and equitable progress of our country.

Capital linkage



Stakeholder linkage



AXIS BANK FOUNDATION

Message from the Chair



“Rural communities are at the heart of India's development journey. Over the years, we have witnessed their resilience in the face of challenges posed by economic fluctuations, climate change and the pandemic. The Axis Bank Foundation has been working towards empowering rural communities with the necessary tools and knowledge to diversify their income streams, enhance their livelihoods, provide access to opportunities and improve their quality of life, with the purpose of building an equitable, sustainable and inclusive society.”

S Ramadorai
Chair, Axis Bank Foundation

Our Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) philosophy emphasises on measurable contribution to the progress of communities by creating timely and pertinent opportunities around the three thematic focus areas of Lives and Livelihoods, Education, and Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy, as well as other needs-based interventions, especially in environmental sustainability. The programmes are driven directly by the Axis Bank Foundation, along with experienced implementation partners.

Our CSR interventions, aligned to Clause 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, and all the subsequent rules made thereunder, are overseen by our Board, guided by the CSR Committee, and are aligned with our CSR Policy.

The Annual Report on Corporate Social Responsibility that provides a detailed breakdown of our CSR spending and thematic disbursement, forms a part of our Annual Report 2021-22, and can be accessed on pages 85-88 of the Annual Report 2021-22.

THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMME

Registered as a charitable trust in 2006, the Axis Bank Foundation (ABF) works towards making rural communities self-reliant through its Sustainable Livelihoods Programme that was set up in 2011. For the last decade, ABF has been addressing the socio-economic and ecological challenges faced in some of the most remote regions in India.

Under the programme, the Foundation focuses on creating stable livelihoods for rural communities and skill development for rural and peri-urban youth. Every project is designed and implemented according to the varied requirements and aspirations of each community. This is achieved by working with several entities, ranging from NGO partners, government departments, residents of the village, on-ground community workers and members of collectives.

The Foundation is progressing towards its ‘Mission 2 Million’ – a goal set in FY 2017-18 to reach 2 million households by FY 2024-25.

10,28,780 MN

Households across 12,436 villages reached through the programme as of March 31, 2022

Case Study



Encouraging Rural Entrepreneurship

Barika Kurudi lives with his family of six in Karanja village, Odisha. He cultivates on 3.5 acres of land. However, income from the produce is insufficient to support the basic necessities and food requirements of his family. Determined to improve his agricultural productivity, he joined the ABF project in his village to learn new techniques. Through the project, Barika was introduced to vegetable cultivation, and he started cultivating on a small part of his land.

During several interactions, the project staff identified his popularity among his community and encouraged him to work as a para-worker to help fellow farmers adopt better agricultural practices. Barika participated in a five-day training programme on vegetable production and started disseminating his knowledge to farmers in three nearby villages. He soon came to be known as an expert in vegetable cultivation.

He was instrumental in mobilising 130 farmers and formed the Ganga-Jamuna Producer Group to provide better market linkages to farmers. Thereafter, through the project, he attended a seminar on vegetables and

fruits to learn about various post-harvest processes, along with credit and market linkages that could help the producer group function more effectively. Last year, the producer group was able to sell 45 tonnes of vegetables like cauliflowers and chillies under his leadership. The producer group has also been able to link different markets of Rayagada, Bhubaneswar and Berhampur in Odisha.

Due to these continuous trainings and exposure, Barika aspired to expand his scope of activities to become an entrepreneur and enhance his own income, as well as to provide better services to farmers. To develop his skills, he was sent for a 15-day residential agribusiness workshop after which he received a license for trading in seeds and fertilisers.

Today, Barika Kurudi has become an established entrepreneur and has transformed his life within three years, with the support from the ABF project. He has diversified his seed business and has also started a community facility centre in the village, to provide various services to farmers.

BOOSTING ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

ABF, through its work on Sustainable Livelihoods, seeks to provide rural communities with equitable access to natural resources, especially water. Over the last couple of decades, climate change, deforestation, pollution, and decreased groundwater have left India's rural communities grappling with a severe water crisis.

Farming communities heavily rely on local water bodies and rainfall as agriculture and allied activities are their primary source of income. Lack of water or erratic weather patterns has far-reaching effects on agricultural output and, consequently, on the lives and livelihoods of the communities.

ABF supports various interventions that are focused on the management of natural resources – land, soil, biodiversity and water. The programme has facilitated

watershed management, repair of existing structures, and tree plantation. Many watershed development activities have been implemented under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS). Farmers have benefited greatly from the water management practices, which include solar-powered lift irrigation, levelling of fields to prevent water runoff, planning the equitable distribution of water resources and promoting less water-intensive crops. These practices have resulted in multiple cropping cycles, improved soil moisture and recharged groundwater levels.

Land use management entails the identification of common land for livestock grazing and the collection of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) and biomass fuel. Good practices around soil are aimed at preventing erosion, retaining moisture and sequestering carbon.

Case Study



Increasing Access to Water

Nikudin Mundu is a marginal farmer who lives with his wife and five children in Ruitola, a tribal village in Jharkhand. Agriculture is his primary source of income. Produce from his vegetable cultivation provided food for the family and a steady source of income. However, his produce was limited as part of his land was uneven, making it difficult to irrigate and cultivate on.

During a village meeting hosted by ABF's project staff, Nikudin expressed his challenges. The Vasundhara Sevak, a para-worker who liaises between the project and his fellow village residents, proposed digging a farm pond to resolve the issue. With support from the project, a farm pond was constructed on the uneven portion of Nikudin's land. Now, Nikudin is able to cultivate all year-round. His farm pond is also a source of water to neighbouring farmers for their agricultural activities.

This support has led to an increase in Nikudin's income and enabled him to diversify into pisciculture as an additional source of income.



ENCOURAGING A 'BASKET OF LIVELIHOODS'

Agricultural productivity of small and marginal farmers is strengthened and increased through capacity building and awareness on crop-planning, mulching, use of organic inputs and adopting multi-cropping practices. Crop diversification is encouraged, along with the promotion of better seeds and crop varieties, which have water requirements in sync with the local conditions.

Improved availability of water has helped in mitigating the risk of crop failure and has encouraged multi-cropping. The use of organic inputs has enhanced soil fertility by improving its nutrient quality and water-holding capacity. These interventions have resulted in the sourcing of higher-quality inputs at lower costs, reduction in investment, higher yields, and increased income, and has overall eased the credit burden of farmers.

ABF supports and encourages rural households to establish a 'Basket of Livelihoods'. This entails diversifying

their income sources and reducing their dependence on a single source of income. Through the programme, communities are introduced to allied agricultural activities such as livestock rearing, horticulture, floriculture, sericulture, apiculture, and fisheries. These alternate means of income sustain their round-the-year food and cash availability, reduce forced migration and provide farmers with an additional livelihood avenue that is not season-specific.

Livestock rearing has especially proven to be a value-addition. With soil and water conservation practices in place, there is better availability of natural fodder in the surrounding areas. There is a strong focus on capacity building and training while supporting a range of inputs such as animal sheds, provision of feed, along with access to credit for acquisition, maintenance and marketing of livestock assets. Additionally, veterinary support such as deworming and vaccinations is made available through a cadre of para-vets who are trained in livestock health management and have experience across different regions.

DEVELOPING RURAL ECONOMIES

ABF's focus on building integrated livelihood value chains has also supported and nurtured local entrepreneurs and microenterprises in rural communities. Through the programme, ABF has facilitated capacity building, improved access to technical and business management knowledge, provided credit linkages, and consistent handholding to stabilise operations of newly established enterprises. With this support, home-based micro-enterprises have leveraged locally available resources and traditional processing techniques, to process and add value to agricultural, livestock and other produce, before bringing them to local and external markets.

Micro-enterprise development has enabled financial independence and empowered rural communities to harness a better quality of life. It has translated into increased purchasing and savings capacity at the household level and increased women's participation in the market or cash-based economies. Local entrepreneurship has also opened up mass employment opportunities at a community level through direct employment as well as indirect employment via channels that source local raw materials.

ENSURING LONG-TERM IMPACT

To sustain rural livelihoods, ABF equips volunteers from communities, also known as, Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and organises rural communities into groups to lead interventions in the future. The long-term goal of making communities economically stable requires community members to actively participate, imbibe new skills and incorporate new processes.

CRPs and community groups are trained to engage respective communities, plan and execute village development projects, maintain and ensure equitable usage of natural resources, access government schemes, avail affordable credit, and boost the bargaining power of communities in formal markets for selling their produce. The programme facilitates the formation and capacity building of community groups such as Self-Help Groups, Farmer Producer Organisations, Federations, Village Development Committees, Cooperatives, Cluster Level Organisations and Water User Associations.

Farmer Producer Organisations create market linkages to provide farmers with better prices on inputs and produce. Water User Associations are focused on watershed management and equitable access to water. SHGs give women a platform to hone their leadership skills while promoting savings and access to affordable credit to expand their livelihood opportunities. This also furthers Axis Bank Foundation's aim to ensure gender equality.

The Foundation's long-term partnerships seek to ensure that the community groups and processes outlive the project period and are independently continued by the communities.

EMPOWERING FUTURE GENERATIONS

India's youth are one of the most vital assets of the nation's economy. Recognising their significance and potential, ABF has been investing in skill development for rural and peri-urban youth and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), to increase their employability in the organised sector and support them in achieving their aspirations. Skill centres across the country, which are run in partnership with NGOs, train youth in various vocational skills and guide them towards career paths aligned with their interests and talents.

Post-training, they are provided with job linkages or assisted in setting up their entrepreneurial ventures. PwDs are supported to find employment in work environments where employers are sensitised to adopt a more inclusive work culture.

Youth Trained

38,009

PwDs Trained

14,114

Number of Skill Centres

97



Case Study



Boosting Agriculture through Innovative Irrigation Techniques

Many small and marginal farming households from the rural hinterlands suffer crop losses due to erratic rainfall. Excess water or the lack of water can both affect crop yield and erode topsoil. Hence, proper irrigation is one of the crucial inputs in agriculture.

In Waghale village of Maharashtra, the soil is conducive for cultivating commercial crops such as onion, garlic and vegetables that can be harvested in shorter cycles, providing regular year-round income to farmers.

To combat the challenge of erratic and unpredictable rainfall, sprinklers for irrigating farms are an option. Yet these can become an expensive investment for farmers. The ABF project collaborated with the farming community to explore alternative, low-cost irrigation models that would address their needs. Rain pipe irrigation came up as an affordable technological solution. Farmers under the project were provided a set of 7 pipes that would irrigate half an acre of land

at a time. The rain-pipe structure could be easily lifted and placed in a different part of the farm once the half acre was irrigated. This has enabled farmers to cultivate throughout the year without any hassle.

Dharmadas, a marginal farmer in the area, had adopted flood irrigation for cultivating vegetables on his plot. However, excess water increased the soil moisture making his crop vulnerable to pest attacks. He had to invest in pest management, and also suffered crop losses.

Through the project, he was introduced to rain pipe irrigation and learned of its advantages. He laid rain pipes in his half acre farm where he grew fenugreek and onions. He has been able to save labour costs associated with flood irrigation and has witnessed a significant decrease in pest attacks. He has been able to produce more of both the crops and fetch higher prices for his produce.

Case Study



Diversifying Livelihoods – Livestock Rearing

Kamali Ahari and her husband Chunilal Ahari hail from Jamun village in Rajasthan. Agriculture is the family's primary source of income, with animal rearing supplementing their livelihood, as is the case with many households in the village. They earned a meagre income from their farm produce and were unable to support their family of four or invest in their children's education, due to the uncertainty in income.

Although Kamali reared 10 goats as a source of income, high mortality rates and poor health conditions of the herd resulted in low reproduction and more challenges rather than steady income. Accessing medical services for the community's livestock was a major issue because of the village's remote location. Timely treatment for sick animals was near impossible to arrange, and residents of the village faced major losses with daunting regularity.

Kamali joined a Self-Help Group (SHG) promoted by ABF through which she was introduced to better livestock health and feed management practices. She also gained access to a livestock community resource person in the village, colloquially known as Pashu Sakhis or 'friends of animals' who provide primary healthcare services and guide livestock farmers when they need

it most. The Livestock CRP provided vaccination and deworming services to Kamali as well as guided her on disease prevention and management of livestock. This hand-holding support helped Kamali significantly reduce mortality rates in her herd and increase profit. As a part of the SHG, she also began saving ₹50 per month.

The ABF project provided Kamali with Sirohi (improved breed) male goats which helped her address the reproduction issues in her herd. Kamali expressed that the new variety of goats was highly profitable. She noted that the indigenous variety of goats produced 2 kids in 24 months but Sirohi breeding goats produced 2 kids in 18 months. Since adopting better healthcare practices learned through the project, Kamali reports that she has not experienced any miscarriages and her herd is now regularly vaccinated and disease-free. She is also able to sell and consume goat milk and uses the increased manure from goat rearing on her farm.

At present, Kamali owns 14 healthy goats. Livestock rearing has enabled her to pay for her son's B.Ed. course. She plans on selling milk and using the profit for her daughter-in-law's education.

AXIS CARES

Axis Cares is our employee engagement programme that encourages and enables all employees to fulfil their Personal Social Responsibility and contribute towards building a better tomorrow.

Under Axis Cares, each project has been carefully hand-picked to reflect our ethos for our community, categorised into six themes –

- 1. Child Needs You
- 2. A Hand for the Elderly
- 3. Sports for Everyone
- 4. Nurture Nature
- 5. Wildlife and Us
- 6. Preserve Heritage Converse India

MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the world continued to grapple with the pandemic and its effects, India witnessed a deadly second wave that left households across the country in a difficult and desperate situation. This intensive and widespread wave resulted

in a massive shortage of resources and over-burdened healthcare systems.

This ended up deeply affecting the health, well-being and livelihoods of rural communities. Poor treatment facilities and weak infrastructure in rural areas made the situation drearier. The death toll in rural India was at its peak since the pandemic began.

To support those adversely and severely impacted, ABF partnered with grassroots NGOs who directly work with rural communities. This ensured faster delivery and agility in responding to the evolving needs on multiple fronts.

ABF, with the help of its partner NGOs, provided kits, with food, medical and hygiene supplies to economically-disadvantaged households and vulnerable rural communities and helped set up isolation centres in villages, provided access to ambulance support, supplied oxygen cylinders as well as refilling facilities. NGOs were able to disseminate timely, accurate and transparent information about vaccines, alleviate apprehensions about it and encourage communities to reduce risks via vaccination. The Foundation's support facilitated vaccination drives in rural communities and supported remote artisan communities in timely medical aid.



AXIS DILSE

Axis DilSe (Manipur)

Our flagship programme in education, Axis DilSe, aims to provide children from remote regions in India with opportunities of better learning. It recently completed its second year of partnership with the Sunbird Trust to support the Lyzon Friendship School in rural Manipur. Under the programme, the infrastructural expansion of the school and its hostel, and pedagogical and training support to its teachers and pupils, enabled it to expand its capacity to 300+ students, all of whom hail from tribal and rural communities.

Axis DilSe (Majuli, Assam)

During the year, we expanded the Axis DilSe programme to Majuli, India's only island district, in Assam. In the region, we are supporting the Hummingbird School established by Ayang Trust, which has 238+ children from the predominantly tribal inhabitants on the island, of which 78 children stay at the hostel.



AXIS BANK SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

We support scholarships that can enable youth, especially women, from economically weaker sections and from Tier-2/3 towns and below, to pursue undergraduate degrees in leading universities.

Ashoka University: The Axis Bank Scholarship programme at Ashoka University, Haryana, continued this year, providing scholarships to 10 female undergraduate students pursuing STEM-related disciplines at the University, in addition to the continuing scholarships to the 10 female students from the previous year.

Plaksha University: During the year, we initiated the Axis Bank Scholarship Programme at Plaksha University, Punjab, providing scholarships to 16 students who are pursuing undergraduate degree programme, from economically weaker backgrounds from Tier-2/3 towns.

COLLABORATING FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

We continued to provide support towards setting up of the 'Museum of Solutions (MuSo)' in Mumbai with JSW Foundation. The Museum, scheduled to open its doors in

FY 2022-23, aims to provide experiential learning beyond classrooms to children from all backgrounds and age groups.

COMMITTING TO MISSION 2 MILLION TREES BY 2027

Under our larger ESG agenda, we have committed to planting 2 million trees by 2026, with an aim to contribute to India's carbon sink, in alignment with the Paris Agreement.

The programme is being implemented by four of our existing implementation partners in the Sundarbans (West Bengal), Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Rajasthan.

The programme is envisaged to be achieved in three cycles of three years each, with the first year for planting and the second and third years for monitoring. The programme design weaves in active community participation and ensures that local species that are best suited to the geographical and climatic conditions are planted.

NEED-BASED HEALTHCARE INTERVENTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact lives and livelihoods of millions of Indians during FY 2021-22. For the second consecutive year, our CSR initiatives focused on ameliorating the hardships of communities most affected due to COVID. We continued to extend our support to front-line warriors including police departments, Urban Local Bodies, government departments, and hospitals, among others, to combat the second wave of the pandemic. This year, we also supported vaccination drives for economically weaker sections in urban areas, in partnership with pertinent government and healthcare entities.

We also supported 120 paediatric cardiac surgeries for children from economically weak backgrounds diagnosed with Congenital Heart Diseases (CHD), in three states.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMME

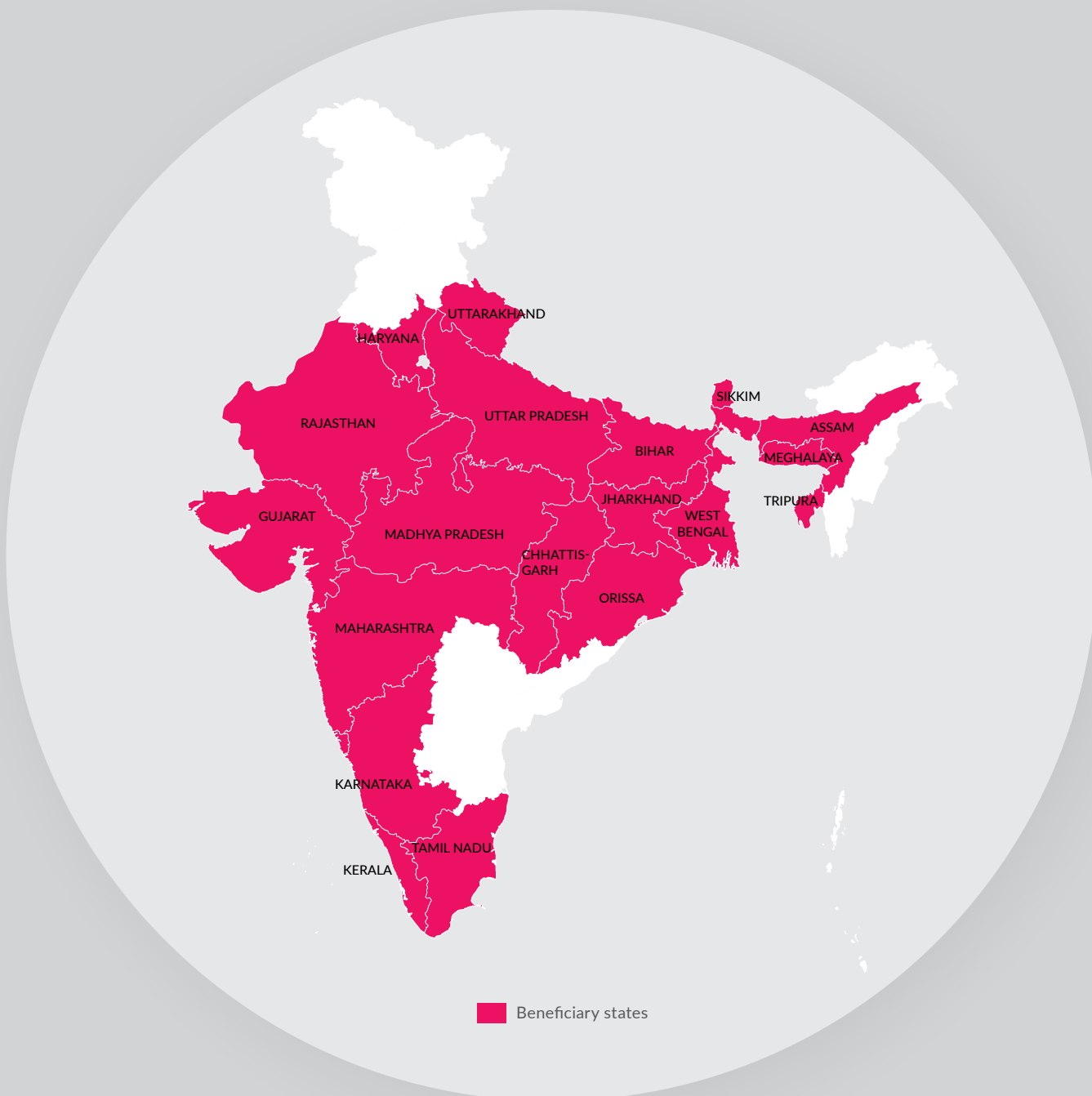
The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the livelihoods of the base of the pyramid, forcing millions of labourers, vendors, small producers and many others to dig into their meagre savings, or borrow from others, to make ends meet, as income dried up. Many continue to remain below their pre-COVID levels of prosperity even today.

The impact of the pandemic has heavily influenced our Financial Literacy Programme (FLP), that supports millions of women in rural and urban India to become financially stronger. Run by our Retail Microfinance vertical under Bharat Banking, the FLP augments our microfinance activities and is delivered by hundreds of our on-ground workers and Business Correspondent partners.

The Programme deploys face-to-face intervention along with audio-visual aids to raise awareness among women on the importance of financial planning, saving, insurance and adopting prudent spending habits, with the intent of making them more financially literate, capable and confident. The Programme also introduces the participants to the various government schemes and facilities, such as the PM Mudra Yojana, The PM Jandhan Yojana and other such insurance and healthcare facilities, and guide them on availing them effectively.

We ensured that both the participants and our representatives maintain COVID-appropriate behaviour at all times.

In FY 2021-22, we reached out to 13.7 lakhs+ beneficiaries across India through our Financial Literacy Programme.



PAN-India beneficiaries of the Financial Literacy Program (FLP)

SACHETANA – PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

In FY 2020-21, in light of the pandemic, we introduced the ‘Sachetana’ initiative to educate participants on ways to protect themselves and their families through better health and hygiene, be aware of the facilities in their vicinity, and remove their apprehensions about vaccination. Sachetana also has a broader focus on aspects such as leading healthy lifestyles through good nutrition and good hygiene.