

# Sustainable Entrepreneurship – A Dyad Case Study on Recycling

Gyandeep Hazarika<sup>1</sup>, Parth Salunke<sup>2</sup>, Ketan Wadhvani<sup>3</sup>, Kasturi Sen<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Student (FPM), MICA: The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad, gyandeepazarika.fpm21@micamail.in

<sup>2</sup>Doctoral Student (FPM), MICA: The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad

<sup>3</sup>Doctoral Student (FPM), MICA: The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad,

<sup>4</sup>Sr. HR Generalist, Kaneria Plast Pvt. Ltd, Surat

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## Abstract

Sustainable entrepreneurship, which ties the knot between sustainable development and entrepreneurship (Frany & Brinder, 2021), is this paper's central theme. Sustainable development has become the central concept in policymaking, business, and society and reiterated since the 1990s (Frany & Brinder, 2021). The various scholarly definitions emphasize sustainable entrepreneurship with a focus on meeting the needs of society without compromising the requirements for the future generation. The focus of this paper is to present the entrepreneurial journeys in a case study format by adopting the qualitative research method. The presentation of the two cases in this paper enunciates sustainable entrepreneurship into recycling and education segment.

**Keywords:** Sustainable, entrepreneurship, recycling, education.

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**Corresponding Author:** Gyandeep Hazarika, Doctoral Student (FPM), MICA: The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad, gyandeepazarika.fpm21@micamail.in

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## Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a defined concept across the world. Scholars enunciate entrepreneurship as an individual's ability to develop and organize an innovative, for-profit, or not-for-profit activity along with uncertainties. Though the term in economics is associated with four factors of production, the concept has evolved as risk-taking, innovation, visionary, etc. Entrepreneurship for any nation benefits employment generation, market development, societal change, standards of living, and promotion of research and development. Scholars acknowledge the

contribution of entrepreneurship in terms of societal development, environmental degradation, and solving the barriers in living standards. In the last decade, entrepreneurship has been looked far away from traditional philosophy to a set of entrepreneurial activities accumulated towards society and the environment (Munoz & Cohen, 2018). These led to an evolution of entrepreneurship into one more segment as "Sustainable Entrepreneurship" (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Gibbs, 2006; Aghelie et al., 2016).

Traditionally, entrepreneurship has been pursued and implemented to generate employment and

economic benefits (Segal et al., 2005). The word has emerged from being called the synthesis of economic development (Kirzner, 1973) to resolving issues of society and environment (Sarango-lalangui, 2018). However, the growing concept of sustainable development (Kerlin, 2006) in academics has proclaimed from generating wealth (Dean and McMullen, 2007) towards sustainability (Sphered and Patzelt, 2011). In 2011, (Schaltegger & Wager) emphasized entrepreneurial activity focusing on society, the commercial, and the environment in terms of necessity. The most cited definition of entrepreneurship by scholars is "the examination of how opportunities to bring into existence, 'future' goods and services are discovered, created and exploited by whom, and what economic, psychological and social consequences" (Cohen and Winn, 2007). Sustainable entrepreneurship is driven to create feasible market infusion and acts as a change agent by exploiting opportunities for sustainable development (Belz & Binder, 2017; Farny, 2016). At present, three views are found in the existing literature of sustainable entrepreneurship, which conceptualizes it as the convergence of environmental, social, and economic sustainability (Farny, 2016). Hence, the literature review section of this paper focuses on broadly three aspects: entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship, and the recycling process used by entrepreneurs. The case studies focus on recycling and education in sustainable entrepreneurship.

## Literature Review

### Entrepreneurship:

The term entrepreneurship is one of the progressive words at present. According to the neo-liberal thought, entrepreneurship is the foundation of opportunistic individualism (Ahl & Marlow, 2012), enabling the human potential of creativity and

innovation to solve problems. The paradigm of entrepreneurship always attempts to focus on problem-solving with creative ways around a business model. It is this paradigm that produces enterprises and entrepreneurs in front of us. The paradigm of entrepreneurship has also inaugurated its various kinds, such as Social entrepreneurship (Davis, 2002), Policy entrepreneurship (Mintrom & Norman, 2009), Art entrepreneurship (Thom, 2017), Rural entrepreneurship (Newbery et al., 2017), etc. All of them always work on a better way to solve the issues for creating value and earning profit from its resources. In the context of this paper, waste as a problem and resource, is identified by social entrepreneurs (Ebrashi, 2013). The identification itself is a sign of movement towards the goal of sustainable development. As per the simple theory of entrepreneurship, an enterprise requires resources to produce and create value. Thus, under the paradigm of entrepreneurship, a new one is called sustainable entrepreneurship (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Their project aims to produce the best value out of the waste in human evolution rather than polluting the environment. Its implication gives ample opportunity to save the environment and build a subway road towards sustainable development in the coming future. If an entrepreneur wants to solve a problem through his enterprise, then waste is the problem that needs to be solved by a sustainable entrepreneur. The issue of the waste industry at present is that even though the laws are formulated but a regulated industry, specialized labors for segregation of the waste with development of Extended Producer Responsibility of the producers of various kinds of junk. Development of these curricula under sustainable entrepreneurship will only be able to see the hope of rays for future generations.

### Sustainability:

Clean air was a typical good at the time, but now it

is good with a lucrative price model. The speed at which we consume our resources, propaganda to save the earth and our future generations has become a need of the hour. Pollution and waste are some of the main events to be marked. To stop this pattern demands a phenomenon that can make people aware and arise towards saving our planet, i.e., sustainable development (Blewitt, 2012). Sustainable development refers to a phenomenon of action for the Human community, where the present need of the community is being met without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs. This phenomenon ultimately involved a community towards (Chichilnisky, 1997) sustainable preferences sensitive to future generations and offered equal opportunities for the present age. However, according to Nancy Lee —(Lazarus et al., 2021), the phenomenon of sustainable development is required to apply from both upstream and downstream in our community to make it successful. The upstream refers to the development contributed by the decision-makers and world leaders in formulating environmental and environmental laws. Big corporations promote sustainable products and services as part of upstream only. In contrast, downstream refers to the people's behavioral adoption of sustainable preferences; developing human capabilities in organizations to propagate a sustainable development service is one.

### Recycling:

"Recycling" is a term used for the first time in the 18th century by the Royal scientist of Europe. It was a search for the possibility to re-use the chemicals for their experiments. Nevertheless, it was after industrialization when the whole recycling process came to be in the limelight of Industrial waste. During the 19th century in the industrial state of Northwestern Europe (Herment & Roux, 2017), the chemical waste was collected

and drained to rural agricultural land from industries. The justification of positivism used nutrients being supplied to the farmland to increase its productivity. However, the amount of chemical waste becomes so high that it degrades the properties of the soil. It led the environmentalist to suggest recycling the trash at the earliest instead of releasing it to the agricultural land must be the option. From then till today, the concept of recycling has become the primary way of moving the community towards sustainable development (Taušová et al., 2019), specifically waste management. The recycling process is also turning itself into a proper digitized supply chain waste management with technological advancement. But the awareness still lacks among the various communities, even though slowly it is taking its place. For instance, the system of exchanging phones or initiatives like disposing of mobile phones by Motorola in the garden were among the initiatives of developing recycling behavior. One should consider that the recycling of the waste concept has not gone far compared to the growth of different kinds of waste from chemical to Plastic waste, Cloth waste, E-waste.

### *Waste:*

In simple terms, waste refers to unused or unwanted materials. Typically, waste is being generated by both the living and nonliving things in biodegradable and non-biodegradable forms, respectively. In the context of this paper, focus on the waste management of non-biodegradable waste has become a big issue (Derksen & Gartrell, 1993) to be raised at the earliest. At present, per annum, we are producing 3 billion metric tons of plastic and e-waste. Under the non-biodegradable waste is plastic (Hopewell et al., 2009) and electronic waste (Zhang et al., 2012), which are in the top concern for us with the arrival of 3D Printing and Electronic vehicles. By the end of 20th century, rapid development of technology has led

to the growth of plastic and electronic waste at 7% per annum. The waste has increased from the industries to domestic, corporations, mess, and meetings worldwide with rapid urbanization growth. Previously, the methods of landfills, Incineration, and sea dumping were the top prior methods of waste management. But at present, enterprises have started to fill the gap of recycling waste instead of discarding and degrading the environment. China, which covers 70% of the e-waste, is now becoming a hub of the e-Waste management enterprises in its rural regions. However, the best use of e-Waste is yet to innovate. In contrast, in the case of plastic inventions like plastic bricks, roads have already started contributing to the development and saving our environment.

### **Research Gap:**

The aim of this research was to introduce the case studies in sustainable entrepreneurship; however, the research presents the profit and not-for-profit based organizations in sustainability in one paper, which was not found in any scholarly article.

### **Research Objective:**

To understand the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship concerning the recycling process and introduce the case studies to the students studying entrepreneurship. The case studies are a dyad, one from a profit sector organization and another from a non-profit organization. The other objective of the paper was to draft the case studies from both profit and not-for-profit areas and contribute to the existing literature on sustainable entrepreneurship.

### **Research Methodology:**

The research is based on a qualitative approach by following the primary method, and in-depth

interviews were conducted and recorded by taking the permission of entrepreneurs. The expert academicians validated the questions of in-depth interviews to avoid the author's biases and avoid any errors. The secondary data was carried on by studying the existing literature from Google Scholar, Absco, and ProQuest.

### **Analysis & Discussion**

*Case Study 1: Recycling and Education – Sustainable Entrepreneurship (Not-for-Profit organization)*

#### *Background:*

The inception of the Akshar model was done twelve thousand kilometers away from Guwahati in Brooklyn, where three people who shared the same philosophy of education as a medium of social transformation met for the first time. After this meeting, Mazin Mukhtar, Parmita Sarma, and Prof. Alka Sarma established Akshar Foundation and started a school, Akshay Forum, in Pamohi locality of Guwahati. The school accepts plastic as fees and follows a hybrid education model called Akshar Model, which blends classroom learning with vocational training. Senior students teach their juniors and get paid for it. These students also enroll in vocational courses and learn skills like carpentry, recycling, solar panel installation and earn from it. Akshar Foundation focuses on improving three Es- Education, Environment, and Employment, through its innovative model.

#### *Social Problem- Child Labour and Quarrying:*

Child Labor is a prevalent and significant issue across India. According to Census 2011, 10.1 million children across India are child laborers. In Assam, more than three hundred thousand children (4.9%) between 5-14 are child laborers (Census, 2011). Poverty and illiteracy are significant

reasons for child labor. Their families' low income and dependency have forced these children to drop out of school and take up odd jobs. Children work in stone quarries in the state, carrying stones and assisting workers in risky conditions. Some work in hotels, restaurants, and home-based enterprises. These child workers have to be paid less than adults, and thus, many people employ their services. Thus, children work from an early age and remain illiterate, repeating the process and pulling them further into poverty. Education is key to social transformation and allows an individual to uplift their status. However, the lack of resources and poverty refrains these children from this fundamental right to education.

#### **Akshar Model of Education- a step towards education and away from child labor:**

The problem of illiteracy and child labor in Assam has been deep-rooted and betiding for centuries. The widespread poverty has led these young minds of the state to an abject state of illiteracy. Akshar Foundation provides an innovative and effective solution to this social problem. It stands at an intersection of Education, Environment, and Employment. It is a blend of classroom-based and skill-based education through vocational training, taking Mahatma Gandhi's vision of vocational schooling. With the advent of the Internet, memorizing facts is gradually becoming insignificant, focusing on skill-based learning.

The Akshar Model of Education allows students to earn while learning. Students are involved in tutoring and other activities on campus, which provides them an opportunity to make. Thus, children who dropped out due to their financial condition and took jobs can return to school, resume their education, and support their households as they move up in the curriculum. These compensation increases allow them to complete their education rather than leaving school

in their senior years. This approach towards engaging and employing students is a decisive step towards eradicating illiteracy and social transformation.

#### **Teaching Pattern and Pedagogy:**

The teaching pattern in Akshar Model is flexible and innovative. It focuses on holistic learning through classroom courses and meta-learning. When children enroll in school, they take regular courses, but the level is assigned to each class. Thus, if a student is weak in mathematics, a lower level for that specific course will be given. This level-wise course allotment helps in strengthening the areas where students' understanding is not strong.

Another critical aspect of the model is Meta Teaching with an idea of 'Earning and Learning.' Apart from regular classroom sessions, senior students tutor junior students on different courses and are paid for teaching. The remuneration increases as they move up in their curriculum. This helps in learning beyond the classroom. While it helps to clear doubts and enhance the learning of juniors, the seniors also grasp a vital skill of tutoring, which shall help them in the future and make them feel responsible.

The evaluation and promotion process is also significantly different from conventional schools. There are no Pass/Fail criteria. Students have to give a weekly test and are evaluated for each course. These tests are evaluated, and after rigorous evaluations, a student is considered for promotion to the next level. Apart from these regular classroom courses, students enroll in vocational training courses, which help them develop skills and opportunities to earn.

### **Vocational Courses:**

The school offers various vocational courses to students. These courses focus on developing skills that will help students in their employment. The students are paid for the work they complete daily in the cash equivalent, which is paid in school as compensation, and can buy essentials. The courses include plastic recycling, animal shelter management, carpentry, electric workshop and solar panel installation, embroidery, and administrative duties such as printing worksheets for classes. It provides students, especially seniors, to earn more money as their responsibilities increase in their households and prevent dropouts.

### **Plastic recycling:**

Plastic recycling is a significant activity for the students at Akshar Foundation. Every Monday, students collect plastics from their house, neighborhood, and markets and bring them to the collection center at the campus. This helps in inculcating the habit of waste segregation in students, their guardians, and other residents. After the segregation of plastic in the collection center, students prepare Bio-Bricks using plastic bottles and bags. These bricks are then used for simple construction projects. The structures made of Bio-Bricks can also be seen at many locations of the school campus. A student prepares 4 to 5 bottles each day on average and is paid for the number of bricks prepared daily. This attempt towards sustainability by Akshar Foundation is grooming these young students to become 'Conservation Warriors.'

### **Plastic as School Fees:**

Plastic as School fees is an innovative way and a significant part of Akshar's model of education. When a parent brings their ward to get admitted, they pledge not to burn plastic ever. Initially, the

students were asked to bring plastic waste from their house to the campus, but complete compliance could not be achieved. Thus, the foundation came up with plastic as a school fees approach which motivated parents to comply and helped build the habit of waste segregation in every household.

### **Challenges:**

In the initial stages of establishing the Akshar Foundation, there were various challenges. The primary issue was to change the well-established practice of child labor. The families were hesitant to send children to school rather than quarry or other workplaces, which would endanger their household income. Thus, door-to-door recruitment was the only way, and parents were explained how the students would earn while attending schools. After initial dilatory recruitment, the students started coming and taking admissions in large numbers. With the spread of positive word of mouth, the admissions rate increased exponentially, and recruitment of students is no longer an issue for the foundation. Lack of funds is another major issue which the foundation faced initially. Specific organizations fund education but not for vocational training and vice versa. The hybrid model of education and vocational training puts Akshar Foundation at these crossroads. Nevertheless, as the foundation moved forward, the funding stream has increased gradually, and now Akshar Foundation receives funding from several organizations and online platforms.

The Akshar Model of Education has been successful in Panahi. The state government is also keen to implement the model in state-run government schools. While the organization aims to establish or partner with more schools in Guwahati, the organization's capacity and other limitations must be addressed to scale up the implementation to a large number of schools. A

solution to these limitations will help Akshar Foundation to fulfill the needs of poor children on a larger scale by their innovative education model. This sustainable education approach will further increase the awareness and inculcate waste management among people taking society towards sustainability and a Better Planet Earth for all.

*Case Study 2: Recycling the E-waste – Sustainable Entrepreneurship (Profit Organization)*

*Background:*

Binbag Recycling Services was established by an aspirant of the Defence force with an MBA and an Engineering Background. After serving in various investment firms like venture capital, investment banking, and consulting services, the Binbag entrepreneur found his knack towards conserving nature to solve various social problems and recycling e-waste. Turning e-Waste into Profits is no less than climbing Everest with Processing over 500 tones.

We live in an era where it has become increasingly difficult to do a very thing without technology. Computers, laptops, and mobile phones are close to our hearts. The absence of these equates to many losing a limb, and the Pandemic has lightened this up. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) published a report collaborating with the accounting firm KPMG, which stated that the "demand for electronic and IT hardware products is expected to touch Rs. 24 lakh crores 2020". This sounds great for companies that function on this horizon. So, here comes the question: what about all the redundant and rejected e-waste? We use cell phones for two years, and then we replace them with new cell phones. Here the question comes: what about that old cell phone? Is the old cell phone being waste? Is every single thing thrown away a waste? According to the Global E-waste Monitor published a report in 2017

stating that "our country has generated two million tonnes of e-waste in 2016".

**Social Problem- E-waste:**

As per the advanced oxford dictionary, "E-waste" is also known as "electronic and electrical waste." "E-Waste is a term used to cover items of all types of electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) and its parts that the owner has discarded as waste without the intention of re-use." Here arises a question: Is such electrical and electronic equipment thrown away or discarded, the end of land? Or can it be re-used after a specific modification? The sole motto to re-use e-waste is for sustainable development; to develop something worth using with thrown away items, promote reusability, recycle, and so on.

**What if we do not recycle e-waste?**

As per Reports, by 2050, e-waste generation will touch 120 million tons globally. Furthermore, India will be at the forefront of this massive pile, with less than 10% collected and documented. Binbag, with the help of the current supply chain model trying to create more and more distributor, local solutions to collect and recycle more e-waste in the formal channels. Binbag is doing that by A) leveraging technologies to improve the supply chain model and B) developing the capacity of the stakeholders in the network.

**Why Binbag?**

Binbag, a Bangalore-based startup, is working closely with 40 small, medium, and large companies. Its services include inspection of the waste that needs to be recycled after receiving an inquiry by the company for collecting it. After that, Binbag sends pickup trucks to collect the e-waste from the site, brought to the startup's processing plants. Currently (Until the year 2021), Binbag is

operationalized in Bangalore, Andhra Pradesh, and Guwahati, Assam. Workers in plants then segregate the waste based on materials like plastic, metals, and rubber for recycling or repurposing. The segregated and recycled parts are sent to recycling companies or downstream companies for their allocation, like plastic manufacturers or smelters.

### **Binbag Model:**

Binbag follows the 3A model - Awareness, Assets, Axis.

#### *Awareness:*

To enlighten more about how e-waste can be re-use or retreat and minimize firsthand. Assets: - To get gold out of garbage i.e., get the best out of e-waste. To utilize e-waste in some better manner so that it can be re-used/ recycled instead of repurposing. Axis: - To have a better supply chain model. As better supply chain ease in better flow of model. As per experience, only 1 million tons can be recycled out of three million tons i.e., only 1/3 can be recycled.

#### *Products can be bifurcated into two types:*

1. Reuse/Repurpose
2. End of life i.e., No longer can be used.

Any large-scale impact cannot be created without Financial Assistance. So Binbag follows "Go rupees for your E-waste" to give money for each collection and believe in sharing profits so that all e-waste can be appropriately disposed.

### **Challenges and Impact:**

The Binbag startup is currently providing its services across the country and extending its arms. However, the scaling up of these operations is not

as easy as it seems. The startup faced several challenges in the initial days of its journey. When they first started, the biggest challenge was growth and identifying the right customers to avail their services. Due to a lack of awareness, Knowledge, and consciousness regarding disposal of e-waste, scouting for new clients continues to be challenging. Despite various challenges, Binbag's work has been recognized by multiple different platforms. It was one of the seven startups selected to present at the Global Social Business Summit in 2015. This event was organized by "Grameen Creative Lab" in Berlin. The Binbag startup was also the winner of the Urban Sanitation Award in 2017 given by "Urban Sanitation Magazine" in association with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The Binbag startup is also working with big clients in the IT industry, like the Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS), headquartered in Bengaluru.

### **Conclusion:**

Entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that creates and brings change by developing a model. It is also about creating value in society and the environment through creativity and innovation. Creativity brings to the table an innovation that constantly attempts to solve the problems of our community. This paper focusses on the problem of unsustainable future which was remarkably solved as the entrepreneurs proposed the solution. The cases present sustainable development through entrepreneurship, which in short form is also known as sustainable entrepreneurship. The sustainable entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that works towards the goal of sustainable development by implementing entrepreneurial orientation. "Sustainable entrepreneurship is, in essence, the realization of sustainability innovations aimed at the mass market and providing benefit to the larger part of society" (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011), and Sustainable entrepreneurship refers to the



discovery, creation, and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities that contribute to sustainability by generating social and environmental gains for others in society (Greco & Jong, 2017). Apart from the definition, these theories are determined to be practical only with the example explored in the paper. It demonstrates the illustrations of sustainable entrepreneurship in the areas of E-waste and the plastic recycling process.

### Recommendations:

Metro cities can be considered for widening the scope of sustainability by both the entrepreneurs. The medium of social networks can be effectively used to leverage the ground understanding of sustainability in the public's mind. Tie-ups with different organizations or governments can be made in the future. Mobile marketing and affiliate marketing can be given a try to increase awareness among the public. The upper class of the society should be encouraged to recycle products and more often the lectures can be conducted at the university and school level to generate curiosity among the budding leaders.

### Limitations & Future Research:

The case studies were selected from one state of India, and in-depth interviews were taken; however, the research has limitations. It represents only two case studies of entrepreneurs working in the sustainability area. Future research can be carried out by analyzing various case studies in the same sector. The case study lacks the understanding of audience's perspective towards the sustainability sector, specific to the firms. The research can be carried out by undertaking the audience perspective on recycling and sustainability. The research was intended to introduce the case studies, future researchers can analyze the themes of the sustainable

entrepreneurs, and more structured views can be drafted in the articles. The domains and the industry sectors can also be taken into consideration for classification.

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