



CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTION

Our Success Stories

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Success Story-1: The Young Sanitation Innovator from Puri

“From Village Drains to National Recognition”

When 19-year-old **Sanjay Raut** from a small coastal village in **Puri district, Odisha**, walked to school every morning, he passed the same sight: *clogged drains, mosquito swarms, and children tiptoeing past pools of greywater*. For years, this was normal. But for Sanjay, it slowly became a problem he couldn't ignore.

A Spark of Curiosity



During a school science exhibition in Class 12, Sanjay first learned about basic greywater filtration. The idea stayed with him. After finishing school, he began experimenting in his backyard using coconut coir, river sand from the Bhargavi riverbank, charcoal from local shops, and discarded PVC pipes from a nearby plumbing store.

His first few attempts failed—pipes leaked, filters clogged, and the water flow stalled. But Sanjay persisted.

Experimentation Amid Challenges

His family supported him, but not everyone did.



“Drain paani filter kariba? Ei pila ra pagala dharana (Filtering drain water? What a crazy idea!),” some elders joked.

But Sanjay kept refining the model. By month three, he created a **low-cost, three-stage greywater recycling unit** using:

- A sedimentation tank made from an old drum
- A sand-charcoal-coir filter
- A simple gravel-based final purifier

The system cost **less than ₹2,500**, far below any market alternative.

Winning Trust Through a Pilot

With help from his schoolteacher and two youth volunteers from the village, Sanjay installed the first prototype near the congested drain behind the local anganwadi centre. Within **two weeks**, the difference was visible:

- Water flow improved
- Mosquito breeding reduced
- The foul smell disappeared

The anganwadi workers praised him, and soon nearby households started asking if he could install the system for them.

From Resistance to Community Pride



The same villagers who doubted him began supporting him. Local women's SHGs of Centre for Development Action (CDA) helped clean drains before installation. Young boys pitched in to carry materials.

The turning point came when the **Gram Panchayat** invited him to present his idea. After a short demonstration, the Panchayat agreed to fund **10 units**, making the village the first in the block to adopt a **youth-led greywater recycling model**.

Scaling Across the Block

Word spread quickly. Within six months:

- **56 households** adopted the system
- The village recorded a **60% reduction in stagnant water**
- Seasonal dengue cases dropped significantly
- The Panchayat incorporated greywater management into its annual sanitation plan

Sanjay trained 12 local youths with support from the Centre for Development Action (CDA) to assemble the units, converting his innovation into a community-driven micro-enterprise.

District-Level Recognition

In 2025, during the **Puri District Swachhata Innovation Fair**, assisted by the Centre for Development Action (CDA), Sanjay showcased his model. The District Collector appreciated the initiative for being "**low-cost, locally sourced, and youth-led**," and recommended it for replication in other Gop and Satyabadi block villages.

Local newspapers featured him as the "**Young Sanitation Innovator of Puri**," and he was invited to participate in a national rural sanitation conclave in Bhubaneswar.

A Legacy in the Making

Today, Sanjay's model is part of ongoing rural sanitation awareness programs, and he dreams of establishing a **Social Innovation Lab for Rural WASH Technologies** in Puri. What began as frustration with clogged drains turned into a movement that empowered an entire community.

From a village alley flooded with greywater to national recognition, Sanjay's journey shows what is possible when youth innovation meets community trust.

Success Story-2: The Girls' Collective That Defeated Anaemia “How a Group of Teenagers Transformed Their School’s Health in One Year”



When the health inspection report arrived at **Kalyani Government High School** in rural Bastar District of Chhattisgarh, it carried an alarming truth: **45% of the girls were anaemic**. Teachers were worried, parents felt helpless, and many girls quietly endured fatigue, dizziness, and shame around discussing menstruation or nutrition.

But a group of 12 spirited adolescent girls decided to change the story.

The Birth of the Nutrition Buddies

Under a school health initiative of Centre for Development Action (CDA), these girls received basic training on:

- Anaemia awareness
- Iron-Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation
- Menstrual hygiene
- Nutrition practices using local foods



Calling themselves the “**Nutrition Buddies**,” they took a bold decision: *they would lead the change, not wait for someone else to do it.*

A Weekly Awareness Drive Begins

Every Thursday, the group launched a “**Healthy Her, Healthy School**” campaign.

They:

- Designed posters on anaemia using chart paper, Hindi captions, and folk art motifs
- Conducted class-to-class talks in simple language
- Demonstrated how to take IFA tablets
- Organized quizzes and drama skits on nutrition and periods
- Helped distribute IFA tablets and tracked weekly consumption

For many girls, this was their first chance to speak openly about their bodies. For many teachers, it was the first time seeing adolescent girls lead a health movement.

Breaking the Stigma Around Periods



The biggest breakthrough came when the Nutrition Buddies assisted by the Centre for Development Action (CDA) hosted a session titled:
“Mo Shareer Mo Garba (My Body, My Pride)”

Here, they shared personal stories about:

- Managing periods in school
- Discomfort in using old cloth
- Being teased or silenced at home
- Not eating properly during menstruation due to myths

Slowly, girls who once giggled or looked away started asking questions. Some even brought their mothers to after-school meetings.

What began as a health drive soon became a movement for confidence and dignity.

Reaching Families, Changing Habits

The girls did not stop at the school gate.

They visited homes and spoke to mothers about:

- Including ragi, banana stem, leafy greens, and jaggery in meals
- Allowing girls equal access to food
- Not restricting them from nutritious items during periods
- Supporting regular IFA consumption

One mother said, “*Mu jaha bujhini, mora jhia mate sikhaila (My daughter taught me what I never knew).*”

The Results: A Remarkable Transformation

After one year of consistent effort:

- Anaemia levels dropped from **45% to below 10%**
- IFA compliance rose to **92%**
- School attendance among girls improved noticeably
- Parents’ meetings had record participation
- Menstrual stigma discussions became normal, not taboo

The school was recognized by the district health department for **“Best Girls’ Health Initiative – 2025.”**

A New Generation of Leaders



The Nutrition Buddies are now peer mentors for other schools in the block. Their confidence is visible—whether they speak on stage, run a session, or counsel a younger student.

From being shy girls who avoided talking about periods to leaders who pushed anaemia out of their school—**they proved that when adolescent girls come together, they don't just change health indicators; they change mindsets.**

This is the story of girls who turned courage into action, and action into transformation.

Success Story-3: Youth Peace Ambassadors Healing Inter-Community Conflict **“How Football Turned a Conflict Zone into a Peace Zone”**

For more than a decade, two neighbouring settlements in a semi-urban town Jagatsinghpur in Odisha lived with an undercurrent of hostility. A small argument could trigger days of tension. Festival seasons, especially, became periods of fear—**police patrols, curfews, and fights between youth groups** were common.

But change came from an unexpected place: a dusty playground and a group of football-loving young people.

The Beginning: A Risky but Courageous Idea

In 2023, Centre for Development Action (CDA) proposed a **Youth Peace Ambassadors** initiative—

to bring together boys and girls from both communities. Most adults were sceptical:

“They won’t even stand near each other—how will they play together?”

But 18 youth, aged 14–20, agreed to try. What united them was one thing: **their love for football.**



Creating “Football for Peace” Circles



The Youth Ambassadors of CDA met every Sunday in a neutral public ground. Before touching the ball, they sat in a circle and co-created rules such as:

- Mixed teams across identity lines
- No abusive language
- No blaming or shaming
- Goal celebrations must include all teammates
- Rotating captains from each community
- A “peace pause”—any player could pause the game to calm tensions

At first, the matches were awkward. Passes were hesitant. Girls feared being ignored. Boys feared being judged.

But week by week, football became a bridge.

Friendships Replace Fear

Within three months:

- Mixed teams stopped feeling “forced”—they felt natural
- Players began practising together after school
- Girls’ confidence soared as they scored, defended, and captained
- Young boys learned to communicate respectfully
- Small conflicts were resolved through the Peace Circle instead of group fights

Parents observed the change. One mother said: “*Mu bahut dina pare tanka hasa sunili—ei khel tanka manaku badalila.*” (*After a long time I heard them laugh freely—this play has changed their hearts.*)

Festival Season Without Fear

The real test came during the next festival season—typically the most volatile period.

But for the first time in years:

- **There were no fights**
- **No police complaints**
- **No retaliatory stone-throwing across neighbourhood boundaries**
- Youth from both communities jointly volunteered to manage crowd flow and street cleanliness during the celebrations

Police officers expressed surprise:

“Earlier we expected trouble. This year, they resolved things themselves. The football group has done what enforcement couldn’t.”

Two Years of Peace and Pride

By 2025:



- The community recorded **zero violent incidents for two consecutive years**
- Football for Peace Circles expanded to include 60+ youth
- Girls formed the area's first mixed-gender football team
- The district sports officer recognised the initiative as a model for "Sports for Social Cohesion"
- Local leaders, once divided, jointly funded new goalposts and lighting for the playground

A father who had once forbidden his son from mixing with the other community said with tears in his eyes:

"Khel tanka chinta dharana badalila. Ebe se manisa ku jebe dekhe, sampraday ra nuhen, bandhu boli dekhe."

(The game has changed their mindset. Now they see people as friends, not as members of a community.)

A New Legacy of Peace

The Youth Peace Ambassadors of the Centre for Development Action (CDA) have become symbols of hope—invited to schools, police stations, and panchayat meetings to share their model. Their message is simple:

"When young people lead with fairness and respect, peace is not a dream—it becomes a habit."

What began as a football experiment ended up healing years of inter-community tension, proving that sometimes the most powerful peace agreements are written not on paper, but on the playground.

Success Story-4: The Tribal Youth Transforming School WASH "From Struggling Student to School Sanitation Champion"

Growing up in a remote Adivasi village in **Koraput district, Odisha**, 17-year-old **Ramesh Majhi** knew the struggles of poor sanitation all too well. At his primary school, taps leaked, toilets were broken, and menstrual hygiene facilities were non-existent. Many girls skipped school during periods, and frequent waterborne illnesses kept children away for days. Ramesh promised himself: *"When I get the chance, I will change this for others."*

Stepping Up as a Leader

In 2023, after joining high school, Ramesh became a member of the newly formed **School Safety Club**. With quiet determination, he convinced his peers to **take ownership of their school's hygiene problems**. Drawing from his own experiences, he said:

"Mu jaahin bhugiluni, anya chhatra bhugantu nuhen (I suffered this, others shouldn't)."



He was soon elected **Club Leader**, and his first mission was clear: improve WASH infrastructure and awareness.

Mobilizing Students and Community

Ramesh, being assisted by the Centre for Development Action (CDA) led small teams to:

- **Repair taps and toilets**, ensuring continuous water supply
- **Paint colorful hygiene murals** showing handwashing, safe drinking water, and menstrual hygiene tips
- **Set up menstrual hygiene corners**, complete with sanitary pad disposal units
- **Conduct peer-to-peer hygiene awareness sessions**, including boys and girls

Encouraged by the Centre for Development Action (CDA), he also involved local **panchayat members, parents, and volunteers**, turning a school project into a community effort.



Impact on Attendance and Confidence

Within six months:

- Girls' absenteeism **dropped by 40%**
- Handwashing before meals became routine for students
- Students proudly presented the school to visiting officials
- Peer-led hygiene sessions improved awareness on menstruation, safe water, and sanitation

Teachers noticed that students were **more engaged and confident**, and the school environment had transformed from a place of neglect to one of pride.

Scaling the Model

The **district education office**, impressed by Ramesh's initiative, decided to **replicate the School WASH model in 20 other schools** across tribal blocks. Ramesh was invited to **train students and teachers**, sharing strategies for building low-cost, sustainable WASH solutions.

A Personal Triumph and Community Inspiration



For Ramesh, the transformation was deeply personal.

He said: “*Mu jaahin bhugiluni, tanka jiban badalilu (I suffered once, now I am changing their lives).*”

From a boy who once dreaded school toilets, he became a **role model for youth-led sanitation**, showing that lived experience combined with leadership can turn challenges into community victories.

Ramesh’s journey proves that when youth take charge, even long-neglected school WASH facilities can become spaces of dignity, health, and inspiration for entire districts.

Success Story-5: Young Climate Warriors Reviving a Sacred Lake “From Climate Anxiety to Action: How Youth Brought Life Back to a Dying Lake”

For 18-year-old **Tashi Lepcha**, a resident of a small town near **Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh**, climate change wasn’t an abstract idea—it was terrifyingly real. The sacred **Lhachu Lake**, a lifeline for local fishers and a stopover for migratory birds, was drying up. Plastic waste clogged its edges, invasive weeds choked native plants, and the water’s surface shimmered with oil residues. Tashi often sat by the lake, feeling **powerless and anxious** about the future.

“I felt like the world was ending, and there was nothing I could do,” he recalls.

Turning Anxiety into Action

In 2024, Tashi joined a **Youth Climate Collective** formed by local schools and NGOs. The group decided to **take responsibility for the lake’s revival**, blending traditional knowledge with nature-based solutions. Tashi became one of the active coordinators, channeling his anxiety into **purposeful action**.



Nature-Based Solutions at Work

The youth implemented a series of interventions:

- **Coir bunds along the banks** to prevent soil erosion
- **Planting wetland vegetation** such as reeds and native grasses to naturally filter water
- **Plastic-free zones** with awareness boards and community patrols
- **Regular cleanup drives**, mobilizing villagers and schoolchildren



The team carefully monitored water levels, biodiversity, and soil quality, learning from local elders about the lake's history and traditional conservation methods.

Community Mobilization

Tashi and his peers organized **eco-awareness sessions** for fishermen, households, and schools, highlighting the link between lake health, livelihoods, and migratory birds. Slowly, villagers who once ignored the pollution began participating, cleaning banks, and reporting plastic dumping.

The elders, initially skeptical of "youth enthusiasm," eventually praised the collective: "*Ei loka ra mehnat, nadika pran phirailu (The youth's effort has brought life back to the lake).*"

Visible Results

Within a year:

- **Water clarity improved**, with fish returning to traditional fishing zones
- **Migratory birds** like the Siberian crane and common teal were spotted again
- **Plastic waste reduced drastically**, with weekly community cleanups continuing
- **Schoolchildren adopted eco-monitoring roles**, planting wetland saplings and maintaining water quality logs

Tashi describes the moment he saw the first flock of birds return: "*It felt like hope had flown back into the lake—and into me.*"

From Personal Anxiety to Collective Empowerment

Tashi's journey embodies a powerful transformation: from feeling helpless in the face of climate change to becoming a **leader of tangible local action**. The Youth Climate Collective now trains neighboring villages in lake conservation, sharing their **replicable, low-cost, nature-based model**.

This is the story of a lake, a community, and a young person's courage—proving that even in the face of climate anxiety, youth-led action can restore ecosystems, livelihoods, and hope.

Success Story-6: The Art Collective That Changed Public Attitudes “When Paint, Stories, and Performance Built Safe Spaces”

In the bustling lanes of **Cuttack's urban slums**, life for adolescent girls and boys was full of challenges—bullying in schools, harassment on streets, and rigid gender norms that kept many silent. Among the residents were shy teenagers like **Ananya Das and Ravi Pradhan**, who had never spoken publicly or expressed their thoughts through art.



But everything changed when they joined “**Kala Yuva**,” an initiative of the Centre for Development Action (CDA), a youth-led art collective focused on social change.

Discovering Their Voice

The collective trained adolescents in:

- **Street theatre** to dramatize real-life scenarios of bullying and gender-based violence
- **Mural art** to depict stories of equality, empathy, and safe practices
- **Storytelling and audio-visual documentation** to raise awareness among local communities

Ananya recalls, “*Mu bhala bhitare chup rahithili, kintu kala mate sahasa deilu (I used to stay quiet, but art gave me courage).*”



Taking the Street by Storm

The collective began performing **weekly street plays** in congested lanes, local markets, and school compounds. They designed **murals on walls near schools**, illustrating messages like “Respect Every Child” and “Girls Have a Right to Walk Safely.”

Within months:

- Their performances **reached over 1,000 residents**, including parents, shopkeepers, and local authorities
- Shy adolescents like Ravi, who had avoided speaking, became confident actors, leading discussions after plays
- Boys in the audience began reflecting on their own behaviour, and community dialogues around harassment became more open.

Creating Tangible Change

The performances supported by the Centre for Development Action (CDA) sparked **community-led action**. Local women’s groups and parents collaborated to:

- Establish a “**safe corridor**” for girls walking to school
- Organize **peer mentorship groups** to prevent bullying
- Set up **public complaint boards** and reporting mechanisms for harassment

Teachers noted a significant **drop in incidents of bullying** in nearby schools and improved attendance among adolescent girls.



Transformation Beyond the Stage

For the young performers, the journey was transformative:

- Shy teenagers became **confident communicators and community leaders**
- They gained recognition from municipal authorities and were invited to present their work at **district-level child protection forums**
- Murals and performances continue to serve as **daily reminders** of equality and safety in the community

From silent onlookers to empowered performers, these young artists proved that creativity is not just expression—it is a tool for social transformation. Through theatre, murals, and storytelling, they turned fear into courage, indifference into awareness, and urban lanes into safer spaces for every child.

Success Story-7: Youth-Led Digital Literacy Hubs Transform Rural Lives

“From Smartphones to Smiles: How Youth Bridged the Digital Divide”

In **Rayagada district, Odisha**, many villagers owned smartphones but struggled to use them effectively. Elderly citizens missed pension payments, farmers couldn't access crop insurance schemes, and schoolchildren lacked support for online learning. Digital illiteracy was silently limiting opportunities—until a group of young volunteers of the Centre for Development Action (CDA) decided to act.



The Birth of Digital Literacy Corners

In 2024, **15 motivated youths** from the district encouraged by the Centre for Development Action (CDA) started **weekly Digital Literacy Corners** in local panchayat libraries and community halls. They began small, training elderly citizens, women SHG members, and farmers in:

- Making **UPI payments safely**
- Accessing **government schemes** like PM-Kisan and pensions



- Using **telemedicine platforms** for health consultations
- Supporting schoolchildren in **online classes and homework**

Their approach was simple but effective: **hands-on, patient, and locally contextualized.**

Building Trust and Skills

At first, elders were hesitant:

“Phone re paisa transfer? Mu bhala bhitare bhul jaibu (Transferring money on a phone? I'll surely make mistakes).”

The youth volunteers of the Centre for Development Action (CDA) paired older participants with peers, demonstrating step-by-step, correcting mistakes without embarrassment, and celebrating small wins. Farmers learned to check crop weather apps; women SHG members mastered submitting microloan applications online. Schoolchildren, guided by the youth, improved access to e-resources, boosting academic performance.

Impact Across Generations

Within a year:

- **DBT uptake increased by 35%**, reducing delays in pensions and subsidies
- Villagers became **less susceptible to digital fraud**, reporting scams early
- **Schoolchildren showed improved attendance and grades** through better online access
- Intergenerational bonding strengthened, with grandparents learning alongside grandchildren

One farmer, Ramesh Sahu, said:

“Mu chinta karuthili je paisa kabhi sahi se nahi miliba. E chhati loka mate mu abharita (I feared my money would never reach me safely. Thanks to these young people, I am now confident).”

Why This Model Works

Youth are **natural digital intermediaries**—tech-savvy, patient, and trusted by communities. The model is **low-cost, replicable, and scalable**, proving that rural India can leapfrog digital barriers with locally-led initiatives.

From hesitant elders to empowered farmers, from struggling students to confident learners, these Digital Literacy Hubs of CDA show that youth-led innovation can bridge divides, unlock opportunities, and transform rural lives—one click at a time.

Success Story-8: Youth-Led Waste-to-Resource Enterprises “Turning Trash into Treasure: How Youth Built a Cleaner, Greener, and Prosperous Community”



In **Berhampur, Odisha**, overflowing bins, scattered plastics, and unmanaged e-waste had become everyday sights. Residents were frustrated, and municipal resources were stretched thin. But a group of 20 enthusiastic young people saw **opportunity where others saw only waste**.

The Birth of a Circular Economy

In 2024, the youth formed “**Green Innovators**,” a CDA supported community-led initiative to **convert solid waste into valuable resources**. The approach included:

- **Composting organic waste** to produce fertilizers for local farmers
- **Shredding plastics** to use in road-laying and construction projects
- **Upcycling scrap into craft products**, sold in local markets and online
- **E-waste collection drives**, partnering with certified recyclers



They collaborated closely with the **municipality**, who provided collection points, and with **local recyclers**, who helped with safe processing.

Creating Livelihoods and Inclusion

The enterprise was designed by CDA to be **inclusive**:

- Women and youth with disabilities participated in sorting, crafting, and awareness campaigns
- Members earned **₹3,000–₹15,000 per month**, supplementing family income
- Youth volunteers conducted **awareness sessions in schools and markets**, teaching citizens about segregation, recycling, and responsible consumption

A young woman, Sunita Behera, shared: “*Mu bhala bhitare samajhili je kachra keval kachra nuhen, se paisa ra source bhi hoi pare* (I realized waste is not just waste; it can be a source of income).”

Visible Transformation

Within a year:



- **Wards became visibly cleaner**, with reduced littering and improved waste segregation
- Local farmers benefited from **organic compost**, reducing chemical fertilizer use
- Schoolchildren and community members began **actively participating in segregation drives**
- The model attracted attention from neighbouring municipalities for replication

Why This Works

This initiative of CDA **leverages the circular economy**, turning waste into products, income, and awareness simultaneously. It creates **local employment**, promotes environmental stewardship, and strengthens community ownership over sanitation.

From trash-strewn streets to cleaner wards, from discarded plastics to profitable crafts, the Green Innovators of CDA demonstrated that when youth lead with creativity and purpose, waste is transformed—not just into resources, but into livelihoods, environmental awareness, and community pride.