


From Access to Agency

Annual Impact Report
2025-26





Who are we, if not
measured by our impact
on the world around us?
That's who we are! We're
not who we say we are,
we're not who we want to
be – we are the sum of the
influence and impact that
we have in our lives.

- Inspired by Carl Sagan



Photograph by Manikandan T. J.

Steering the Work Forward

LEADERSHIP: STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE



KALPANA KAR
Managing Trustee,
Microland Foundation



PRADEEP KAR
Trustee, Microland Foundation



RAJA GOPALAN
Trustee, Microland Foundation

CORE TEAM



Team Microland Foundation (left to right): Sanu Mathew, Associate Director; Somya Trivedi, Associate Lead; Kalpana Kar; Teena Clotilda, Executive; Susan Puthenveedu John, Senior Analyst; Kawshiki Shrivastwa, Senior Analyst – Learning & Development; and Veeresh Mallikarjun Ujjain, Senior Lead.

Microland Foundation's work is shaped on the ground. The team works closely with partners to co-create and implement solutions, often spending extended time in the field. Over the years, this proximity has blurred boundaries. In some cases, the team is seen less as an external facilitator and more as part of partner ecosystems—reflecting a hands-on approach that ensures interventions translate into tangible, lasting change.

Dear Friend of Microland Foundation,

When I look back at the past year, it feels like a blur. Not because there is little to remember, but because there has been so much. Moments of progress, pauses for reflection, things that worked, and things that taught us how to do better.

In the kind of work we do, change takes time. Well-being takes time. And the kind of change that leads to lasting impact across communities and systems takes even longer.

It is easy to look for quick outcomes. But what we are building is something deeper and more enduring. Our vision is to create well-being that is wider in reach, deeper in impact, and ultimately owned by the community itself. Over time, the systems, knowledge, and confidence to continue should rest with the people we work alongside.

At Microland Foundation, we see ourselves as catalysts in this journey of change.

Over the years, our work across *Employability, Education, Environment, and Health* has helped us understand that these are not separate areas. They are deeply connected. You cannot solve for one without engaging with the others. Our approach has therefore evolved into collaborative problem solving. We work across sectors, with partners and communities, to address challenges in a way that is holistic and sustainable.

This is what we mean when we speak of a Flourishing Nilgiris. Not as an idea, but as something that is built and owned by the Nilgiris itself.

We have learned to resist the urge to arrive with ready-made answers.

Instead, we see our role as enablers of change. We bring together knowledge, best practices, and partnerships, and work alongside communities to build solutions that are relevant and lasting.

This year, that approach translated into a set of efforts that are both diverse and connected:

- **In Health**, our work has moved towards addressing critical gaps in access, especially in areas like pain and palliative care where support is often limited. Through initiatives like **Pain-Free Nilgiris**, we are working to build systems that bring care closer to people, while also beginning to shift how care is understood and delivered.
- **In Education**, initiatives like **DigiShiksha** and **STEAM Smart** have opened up access to technology. For many students and communities, this is their first real interaction with digital learning. It is not just about using devices, but about seeing new possibilities.
- **In Employability**, initiatives such as **Digipreneur** are focused on building skills, strengthening local enterprise, and ensuring that more people—especially in underserved communities—can access services, schemes, and opportunities they are entitled to.
- **In Environment**, initiatives such as sanitary worker certification and waste management programs are strengthening local systems, building skilled frontline capacity, and enabling more efficient, decentralized practices that respond to the Nilgiris' ecological context.



We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.
 — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

At the heart of this journey is collaboration, strengthened through partnerships and capacity building.

We have been fortunate to work with partners who bring deep expertise and strong connections to the communities they serve. Our role has been to support and strengthen this ecosystem so that the work can sustain and grow independently.

This year, our engagement with the District Administration of the Nilgiris has been an important step forward. It has shown us what becomes possible when intent aligns with systems. It has also reinforced that meaningful scale requires collaboration.

A key focus has been capacity building. We have invested in our partners and communities so they have the tools,

knowledge, and confidence to take this work forward.

As a technology-led organization, we are also exploring how digital and integrated approaches can support this work. This includes connecting people, data, and ideas in ways that make problem solving more effective.

Alongside this, the role of Microlanders through Culture of Giving continues to add depth to our efforts. Their engagement brings energy, perspective, and a stronger connection to the work on the ground.

What is emerging is an ecosystem that is collaborative, evolving, and increasingly capable of carrying this work forward.

As we look ahead, our focus is not just on expanding what we do, but on deepening how we do it.

The challenges we are responding to are evolving. Communities are changing. Needs are becoming more complex. This calls for approaches that are more integrated, more responsive, and more grounded in collaboration.



In the Nilgiris, we will continue to strengthen our efforts towards building a Pain-Free Nilgiris, creating systems that are structured, sustainable, and carried forward by local networks. In the environmental space, our work will align with the 2026 waste management regulations, with a focus on decentralized models that protect the biosphere and support long-term ecological balance.

Across all areas, our intent is to move from intervention to ownership. To build systems that do not depend on us, but continue because communities believe in them, lead them, and sustain them.

Because ultimately, the measure of our work will not be in what we create but in what continues without us.

Before I close, I would like to acknowledge those who make this work possible.

To the Microland Board and leadership, thank you for your continued belief in this vision and for trusting us to pursue it with intent and conviction. Your support has enabled us to think long-term and stay committed to what truly matters.

To the District Administration of the Nilgiris, thank you for your partnership and for the trust you have placed in this work. Your collaboration has been instrumental in helping us move from intent to action, and from effort to scale.

To our partners across regions, thank you for your commitment, your openness, and the work you lead every day. This journey is as much yours as it is ours.

To Microlanders, your engagement continues to bring energy and meaning to this work.

And to the Microland Foundation team, your commitment and persistence are what bring this vision to life on the ground.



There is still much to be done. But what gives me confidence is this. We are no longer working towards isolated outcomes. We are contributing to something larger. A system that is connected, capable, and led by the people it is meant to serve.

A future where well-being is not delivered, but built. Not dependent, but owned.

And that is the direction we will continue to move towards.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
 — Margaret Mead

With gratitude & appreciation,

harpnaha

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Our Valued Partners

ECOSYSTEM OF COLLABORATION



Sector

EDUCATION

Building Future-Ready Skills

From foundational learning to advanced digital exposure, our work in education is enabling first-generation learners access opportunities that were once out of reach. By strengthening infrastructure, nurturing teacher capacity, fostering curiosity-led learning, and opening doors to sport through exposure visits, we are equipping students with the skills and confidence to step boldly into what lies ahead.

6,000+

Students impacted

10

Institutions transformed

100+

Teachers trained

08

Digital / STEAM labs set up

STEAM Smart

Awards & Recognition

Students participated in 34 competitions at the District, State and National Levels; won awards in 21 of them

Reach & Engagement

5,000+

Students reached

13,000+

Community members reached

630+

Students attended Design Thinking workshops at Government ITI and Arts & Science College, Gudalur

Capacity Building

80+ (inquiry-based learning and technology integration)

Teachers trained

Learning Lab

50%

improvement in reading fluency

21%

average improvement in Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM)

120 → 135

Average improvement in Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM)

DigiShiksha

600+ students and **200+** community members

28

Courses created on the LMS

26

Teachers trained

08

Students placed

6,270 km

Total bus distance covered

18

External conferences held in the Video Conferencing Studio

Kreedashala

Program Reach & Delivery

189

Children enrolled for sports

05 days/week

Training sessions conducted

Behavior & Well-being

80%

Reduction in behavioral and counselling cases

Academic & Social Development

70%

Students showing improved concentration and academic engagement

80%

Reduction in bullying, isolation, and anxiety

Improved homework and classwork completion rates



EDUCATION
Kreedashala

Partner: BANGALORE YOUTH FOOTBALL LEAGUE (BYFL), LIGHTHOUSE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY AND REACHING HAND
GEOGRAPHY: Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

MICROLAND
FOUNDATION



Turning Play into Possibility

Microlanders playing a game of football with Kreedashala children.

Kreedashala, a program by Microland Foundation, is opening up more than just access to sport for children from foster homes and underserved communities. It is creating a space where confidence grows, friendships take root, and new opportunities come alive.

Over the last four years, Microland Foundation has helped turn the field into a place of growth. What starts as play leads to confidence and a path towards livelihoods built around sport.

Moses, a class 10 student at Lighthouse International Academy, once watched from the sidelines, unsure of himself. Now, he plays with a sense of strength that carries into his daily life. Suguna's journey reflects a similar shift. With steady support and repeated practice, she has grown more assured and resilient.

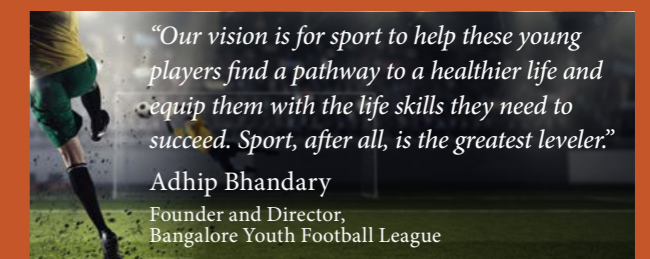
Today, 189 children train five days a week across multiple sports through Kreedashala. For many, this is their first experience of structured sport. Some have gone on to train at the Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence and Bangalore Youth Football League.



Kalpana Kar presenting a sports kit to a Kreedashala child.

Mentor interactions and live matches have expanded what feels achievable. Schools have also seen fewer behavioral issues, lower bullying, and sharper focus during classes.

As the first batch moves on, some are pursuing competitive sport more seriously, while others are finding opportunities shaped by the discipline and skills built here. With coaches, teachers, and Microlanders supporting the program through the Culture of Giving, Microland Foundation is helping more children step forward with confidence.



"Our vision is for sport to help these young players find a pathway to a healthier life and equip them with the life skills they need to succeed. Sport, after all, is the greatest leveler."

Adhip Bhandary
Founder and Director,
Bangalore Youth Football League

A College Finds its Window to the World

Every morning, eighteen-year-old Sherwin Samuel rides his scooter seventeen kilometers through the hills to reach Providence College, with his sister on pillion. A few months ago, he presented a technical paper on cloud computing at an international conference. Recently, he discovered that he wants to be a CEO—his eyes bright and brimming

behind his glasses as he says it, as if he has already caught sight of the future. And if you ask him about his resume, he speaks in the plural—he is working on several versions having realized there is a lot of ground to cover, and that covering it is now possible.

Until a few months ago, none of this felt within reach.



Providence College, Coonoor — the Nilgiris' first NAAC 'A'-graded women's college, now open to boys too, and still rooted in its original mission: bringing first-generation learners from rural and tribal communities into higher education.

Providence College sits in Coonoor, in the Nilgiris—the kind of place where the distance from almost everything can feel like a geographic fact of life. Most of the students here are first-generation learners. Financial pressure is common. And while ambition is not rare, the infrastructure to meet it has been.

A Vision Thirty-Six Years in the Making



Dr. Sr. Sheela V.J., Principal of Providence College. Thirty-six years with this institution, and a clear-eyed belief that its students deserve to be ready for an AI-shaped future.

Dr. Sr. Sheela V.J. has been part of this institution for over thirty-six years—first as a student in 1990, later as a member of the faculty from 2007, and now as its Principal. Having witnessed both its past and its potential, she is committed to ensuring that her students do not miss a single opportunity. *“Everything should be within their reach,”* she says. *“They can reach for the skies if they stretch out their hands.”*

That ambition found a partner in Microland Foundation's DigiShiksha initiative. As Dr. Sr. Sheela reflects:

“Our earlier engagement with Microland Foundation, particularly through support for access to education and scholarship initiatives, helped address access and continuity for several of our students. This phase of the partnership strengthens the institution through a first-of-its-kind, state-of-the-art digital learning infrastructure

in the Nilgiris, including a Data Science Lab and Video Conferencing Studio. It also supports faculty to integrate these facilities into everyday teaching. This directly enhances classroom learning, student exposure, and career preparedness across departments.”

The DigiShiksha journey began with a bus—an early step toward the access Dr. Sr. Sheela speaks of. Microland Foundation donated it to help students from outlying areas make the commute, particularly girls for whom two or three early-morning connections had made attendance impossible. As a result, attendance began to recover. What followed were scholarships, carefully scrutinized through one-on-one interviews to identify students most at risk of dropping out due to financial pressure. Thirty-five students have been supported so far. Sherwin is one of them. *“I am really happy that I could lessen the burden on my parents, and I get to focus on my studies,”* he says. *“My parents are very proud that I secured this scholarship. One of my goals is to see them retire early.”*

Another recipient is a first-year student named Monisha, whose mother is a single parent. She used her scholarship to enroll in TNPSC (Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission) coaching—a possibility that had simply not existed before.

Architecting the Ecosystem



Lokesh N, Associate Lead – Learning & Development, Microland. One of the Microlanders who transformed the learning ecosystem at Providence College.

Once scholarships were in place, the conversation turned to infrastructure. This is where a dedicated team of Microlanders stepped in—each bringing deep technical knowledge to a college that had never worked with the corporate sector before. Lokesh N was one of them.

As Associate Lead in Learning & Development at Microland, Lokesh has spent over fifteen years building training ecosystems that prepare people for real-world technical environments. On his first visit to Providence, he saw what was missing: limited infrastructure, no centralized learning system, no way to track progress,



The Data Science Lab at Providence College, where the Nilgiris' first generation of data scientists are finding their footing.

and little exposure to how technology operates beyond textbooks. What followed was a remarkable shift.

The Data Science Lab was reimagined with an enterprise mindset—upgraded desktops with dual-boot capability, allowing students to move between Windows for foundational work and Linux for AI and ML. A dedicated Mac Mini setup enables students to run AI workloads locally, moving beyond surface-level tools.

Crucially, the system was designed for continuity. New servers, network layers, and a Learning Management System (LMS) were integrated into the environment, allowing faculty to upload materials, assign work, and track progress, while a unified login system ensures that students can move across machines without losing their work. Providence didn't just get an infrastructure upgrade—it gained a new ecosystem, planned in advance and deployed on-site within days.

One moment carried particular weight, when students volunteered to help. *"There were small adjustments needed across dozens of systems, something that would have taken days,"* Lokesh recalls. *"The students just came forward, we showed them once, and they executed those changes across all systems."*

Dr. Savidha R, who leads the Internal Quality Assurance Cell at Providence and coordinated the implementation, says the partnership itself was a learning experience. What stood out to her was the level of attention. *"The Microland team asked about RAM, server models, and the exact gaps the college was living with—and then addressed them. They held our hand throughout."*

That attentiveness extended to the Video Conferencing

Studio. *"We never had this idea,"* Dr. Savidha says. *"We had asked for a small room with a camera for content creation—but the Foundation saw further."* What Providence needed was not just to record content, but to bring the most brilliant minds and mentors of the world in.

The transformation was tangible: 70 workstations, 15 laptops, a Mac Mini corner, a dedicated server network, and a seminar hall converted into a fully equipped conferencing space with an 86-inch interactive display, PA system, podium, and seating for sixty. The computers now have individual login credentials. A student can



Sherwin Samuel, first-year BSc Data Science student, describes the lab as "something in the movies."

walk in, sit anywhere, pick up exactly where they left off. It sounds simple, but in this context, it is transformative.

Every faculty member too now has a login—a space to upload syllabi, assignments, and quizzes, and to track student progress.

The Data Science Lab and the Video Conferencing Studio were inaugurated on January 27, 2026. An online examination, which had previously failed using the old lab, was recently conducted successfully.

The new education policy requires that 40% of the curriculum be delivered online; for the first time, Providence College has the tools to meet that standard.

Dr. Shivalingam, who heads the Data Science department—whose first batch of nine students is only now graduating, all selected by a company from Bengaluru—shares: *"The labs are now used across disciplines—commerce students for SPSS, mathematics students for MATLAB, final-year students for design on the Mac Minis."*



The Video Conferencing Studio, bringing expertise from across the world into the college.



Dr. Shivalingam, Head of the Data Science department, encourages first-year students to participate in international conferences because he sees no reason to wait.

The college also hosted a hackathon with 34 teams from different colleges—the first time an event like this had been held here. Dr. Shivalingam adds, with a hint of pride, *"Our own Data Science students won first place for best implementation and placed second for best idea."* Visitors from Mahatma Gandhi Matriculation School also used the facility and expressed interest in returning to Providence for higher education.

Watch the highlights from the hackathon



The possibilities extend further. A language lab is being built into the timetable, with communicative English sessions open to all programs. More significantly, Providence has applied to NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) and SWAYAM (India's government-backed MOOC platform) to become an examination center for the Nilgiris. Students currently travel to Coimbatore—but the early mornings, long distances, and costs often discourage participation.

"If it happens," Dr. Savidha says, *"the NPTEL courses are really good. They are taught by professors from IITs and IISc, many of them among the most experienced in their fields. I am taking one myself."* She hopes Providence can become that center for the district.



Tmt. Lakshmi Bhavya Tanneeru, District Collector of The Nilgiris, inaugurating DigiShiksha at Providence College, with Kalpana Kar and Principal Dr. Sr. Sheela.

What Comes Next

Dr. Sr. Sheela speaks not just of what has been built, but of what it enables. *“We feel we have a strong support system in Microland Foundation. Their team came in with clarity and depth, and that has given our faculty the confidence to take on what comes next—especially as we move into AI and digital learning. For many of our mid-career teachers, that kind of handholding really matters.”* What she hopes for now is continuity: a digital library, and an incubation center where students can experiment, build, and take their ideas further. Her vision for Providence is clear: a model college, eventually a university, where every student can realize their dreams.



Dr. Savidha is currently pursuing the possibility of establishing the college as an NPTEL-SWAYAM examination center, leveraging the newly set-up lab.

What DigiShiksha represents, across all of this, is an ecosystem. Beyond a single intervention, it is an implementation of many—each addressing a barrier that, once removed, reveals the next. Scholarships, then infrastructure, then faculty capacity, then career readiness. Across Providence College’s programs today, hundreds of students are navigating that chain—some held in place by a scholarship, others energized by a lab that finally matches their ambition.

Sherwin has been part of that journey from early on. A trip to Bengaluru, facilitated by Microland Foundation, was the turning point for him. *“It really broadened my vision.”* He still has four semesters left. He reads *The Diary of a CEO*, plays basketball, and spends his free time working on his speaking skills. And now, when he rides seventeen kilometers through the hills every morning to reach college, the future feels closer and brighter than it ever has.



Faculty and leadership of Providence College, alongside the Microland Foundation team and Microlanders, at the inauguration of the Data Science Lab and Video Conferencing Studio on January 27, 2026.



Scan the QR code to listen to voices related to this piece.

The next generation of Providence College students — for whom the window is already open.

Before the Elephants Arrive

A Girl, AI, and a Village That Won't Be Caught Off Guard

What happens when a village and a forest share the same path?

Puliyambara doesn't appear on most maps. It sits deep in the Nilgiris, a tribal village folded into forested hills where elephants and people have long shared the same corridors, the same uneasy proximity. For generations, that relationship has demanded vigilance. What it hadn't had was someone from inside the village deciding to build her own answer to it.

Thirteen-year-old Fathima Minha is a 7th standard student at Government High School Puliyambara, and a member of the school's STEAM Smart club. And

like every family in this part of the Nilgiris, hers lives with the reality of human-wildlife conflict up close.

Her own house sits along a corridor where elephants still travel. The school has had its campus entered ten times. Principal Sankar remembers one afternoon with particular clarity. "It happened at 3:30. I locked the gate and saved the children."

As habitats shrink and settlements expand, encounters have grown more frequent and dangerous. Official records show 45 deaths between 2017 and 2023, against just 11 over the previous decade. Multiple fatalities followed in 2024, and at least 5 more in 2025—many along the O'Valley corridor near Puliyambara, where farms press against elephant routes¹. The community's question has never been about blame. It has always been about coexistence—how to protect people without declaring the forest an enemy. That question found Fathima in the STEAM lab.

Fathima (R) and Keerthika (L) walk an audience through their AI Wildlife Alert System.

The program that taught her to look

The STEAM Smart Program, supported by Microland Foundation and implemented by Learning Links Foundation, runs across government schools in Rayakottai and Gudalur, reaching students from classes 6 through 8. It equips them with robotics kits, coding tools, 3D printers, and a design thinking methodology—building the reflex to spot a real problem and act on it, through a hub-and-spoke model of tinkering labs across seven schools in Gudalur alone.

The early modules are deliberate. Students begin small—redesigning a school bag, rethinking an exam pad—learning, first, to see. "Slowly they start identifying the problem areas," says Sandeep Parthiban, Chief Manager at Learning Links Foundation. "Then we say—now find the problems in and around your village and community."

For Fathima, the answer was immediate. "Elephants. They come into homes, farms, everything."



Sandeep Parthiban, Chief Manager at Learning Links Foundation, believes India's next wave of innovation will come from school students who were simply given the tools and the freedom to use them.

The build

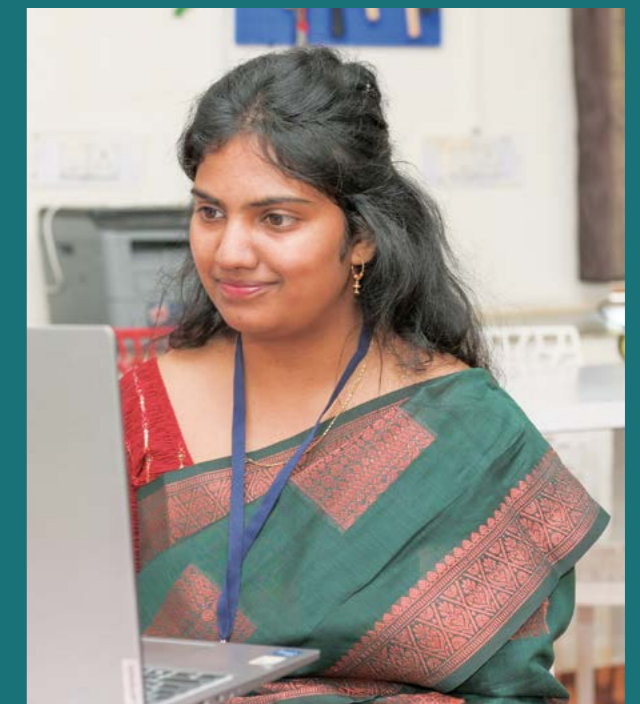
Fathima found a teammate in Keerthika, who had wandered into the STEAM Club thinking it was just another classroom. "First, I thought this was a normal class. Then I got to know it's science and technology—that's when I got interested in robotics."

Together they approached Angel Getcia, the STEAM Lab Resource trainer from Learning Links Foundation, who gave them a task: research what already exists, then come back. Angel's principle is unambiguous. "I gave them direction, not ready-made solutions. I wanted them to figure it out on their own—and whenever they needed me, even after school hours, I was there."

Weeks of YouTube, late evenings, and round after round of revision followed—with the girls learning image classification and machine learning through PictoBlox, a drag-and-drop coding platform. Their first version was code only, on a laptop. They took it to a competition, but it wasn't selected. "Something with only the coding will not work," Fathima said. "We have to make the prototype also."

So, they came back and built something one could hold.

Angel Getcia — mechatronics engineer, robotics & STEAM trainer, and the person who never once said no when a student needed more time in the lab.



Scan the QR code to listen to voices related to this piece.

¹Sources and references:
<https://zoosprint.org/index.php/zp/article/download/8009/7256>
<https://journalijcris.com/sites/default/files/issues-pdf/01207.pdf>
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/gudalur-forests-encroachments-blamed-for-man-elephant-conflict/articleshow/97630085.cms>
<https://www.onmanorama.com/news/india/2025/08/09/elephant-attack-gudalur-oty.html>
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2025/Sep/12/human-wild-animal-conflict-gudalur-observes-shutdown>

The AI wildlife alert system

The prototype is a miniature world. A cluster of small houses on one side—the village, dense forest on the other, and a corridor between. Trained on thousands of images using an AI teachable machine, the system learns to recognize an elephant entering the frame. The moment it does, a notification is sent to nearby residents and/or authorities—an early warning system. It's low-cost, replicable, and built by two 7th graders from a tribal village in the Nilgiris.

Throughout the build and the countless presentations since, Fathima and Keerthika's collaboration has been the steady engine behind everything. During presentations, one picks up exactly where the other leaves off. "Because of teamwork we have won awards. Whenever Fathima forgets something, I take up. Whenever I forget, she helps," says Keerthika. "And sometimes we really took the attention of the judges because of that."



From a tribal village in the Nilgiris to a filed patent, Fathima's AI Wildlife Alert System makes headlines and history.

The moment that went viral

At the Nilgiris Book Fair in October 2025, the STEAM Smart Program set up a showcase, giving students a platform to present their projects to the public and community leaders. Fathima was unaware that the District Collector of the Nilgiris would be stopping by.

Before the Collector reached her table, another official paused mid-conversation to tell her the project was remarkable, which made Fathima think, "I did something good. I have to explain it much better."

When the Collector arrived, Fathima spoke clearly and confidently. She wasn't aware of the camera rolling. She had mentally primed herself: *Why should I be afraid? I'm the one who is going to explain. She doesn't know anything about my project.*

The video, shot by the Cuddalore press and picked up by Behindwoods TV, one of South India's most-followed YouTube channels, went live while she was still at the fair. By the time she got home, her mother had seen her on television and her father had called from Saudi Arabia.

"I never imagined something like this would happen," her mother, Samira, shares. "Now everywhere I go, people know me as Fathima's mother." In five months, the video has crossed 5.2 million views.



To watch the video that went viral, scan the QR code.

What comes next

Before the STEAM lab, Fathima wanted to be a District Forest Officer. Now she wants to be a scientist. A patent for the wildlife alert system has been filed. Keerthika wants to become a robotics teacher—Angel Ma'am, she says, had everything to do with that.

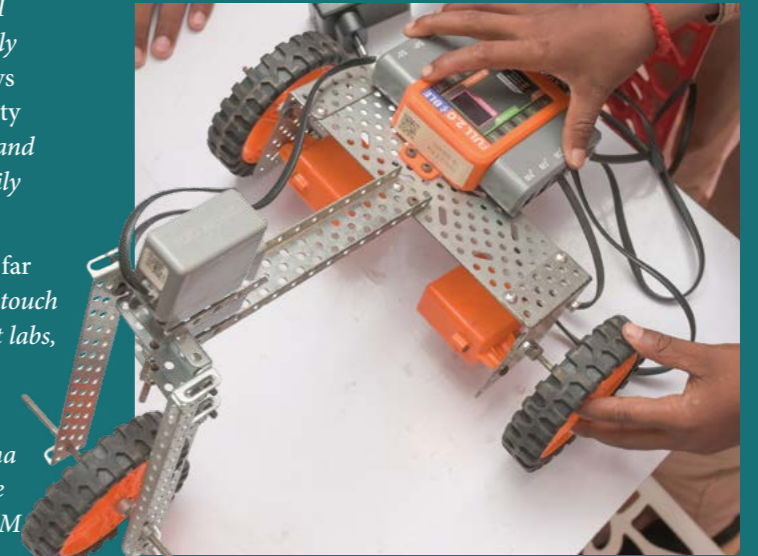
The ripple effects reach further. Government approvals that once moved slowly now come quickly. "When I give any letter to the district committee, automatically they are approving it because of the STEAM lab," says Principal Sankar. Tamilselvi, the school's community representative, shares, "College professors, officials, and parents who once needed to be invited now voluntarily arrive on their own."

Sandeep sees all of this as the outline of something far larger. "When we were studying, we were told: don't touch the laptop, it will get damaged. In the STEAM Smart labs, everything is meant to be tinkered with."

India files roughly 50,000 patents a year—at least, that's how I understand it—while countries like China are far ahead. My view is that we should aim to close that gap over time. For that, we need to set up STEAM labs like these in almost every government school."

The forest is still there. So is the village. And in the STEAM lab between school hours, more students

are already at work—on landslide detection, on safer pedestrian crossings, and on emergency medical alerts for remote areas. Fathima was the first from Puliyaambara to gain wide recognition. She won't be the last to build something worth watching.



At the STEAM Smart Lab, hands are allowed to try, to build, and occasionally, to get things wrong. That's how learning and discovery happen.



Principal Sankar, who gave the STEAM lab a home at Government High School Puliyaambara, and watched the school's reputation travel far beyond Gudalur.

Strengthening Foundational Learning in the Nilgiris

Not too long ago, the community resource center at Government Municipality Middle School in Gandhipuram was used as a storage space. Outside, the playground sat mostly unused. Inside classrooms, reading levels were uneven, digital access was rare, and for many children—especially from the Shola tribal community—basic literacy felt out of reach.

BeMyBuddy Foundation, a grassroots organization working with underserved children in the Nilgiris, saw something else: possibility. Their focus was on improving English fluency and digital literacy among children who were falling through the gaps, particularly first-generation learners and those from tribal communities who found it difficult to keep pace with the classroom.

Microland Foundation came in to support the initiative—strengthening infrastructure, training teachers, and introducing structured tools such as Karadi Path, the Read Along app, and TARA assessments. The space gradually evolved into a Learning Lab, with reading, digital, and creative corners becoming part of the school day.

“Students who were afraid to come forward slowly started telling stories in the assembly,” says Asha Begum, Learning Lab Coordinator from BeMyBuddy. Students from the Shola tribal community, several of whom arrived without knowledge of the alphabet, now participate confidently.

Something else began to shift too. Parents started showing up. Dropping children off for evening sessions, coming back to pick them up, sitting in on workshops, and asking for more—sessions on digital skills, communication, and understanding schemes. “Parents say our school feels like a private school now,” shares Principal Shyamala.

But the real change is seen in children who once

stood at the edges now stepping forward, staying, and beginning to believe they can go further in their learning. A few students have gone on to win at the block and district levels in the *Kalai Thiruvizha* competitions for storytelling, writing, and poetry.



A student discovering what's possible in the digital corner of the Learning Lab.



Scan the QR code to listen to voices related to this piece.



Sector EMPLOYABILITY A Life of Dignity for All

Our work in employability is about building real pathways to income and independence within communities. We equip individuals from underserved communities with digital skills, tools, and support to deliver essential services and government schemes—helping them earn a steady livelihood as they raise awareness and make these services accessible to their communities and neighboring villages.

Digipreneur

Reach & Coverage

200+

Awareness camps conducted

25+

Training sessions done

1,63,306

Citizens served

Economic Impact

₹6,000 → ₹20,000

Average monthly income increase

₹82L+

Total income generated

Service Delivery

750+ schemes and services

Digital/Government services delivered



The Man Who Gets Things Done

Devapura is a semi-arid village of roughly 2,000 people in Karnataka, surrounded by smaller hamlets with limited access to digital infrastructure. For most residents, getting State and Central Government Welfare Schemes processed has meant long journeys, lost wages, and no guarantee of success.

Digipreneur Sharath DP, 28, who grew up here, is changing that. He runs Prathiksha Digital Service Kendra—a digikiosk the community relies on and trusts. His work is now beginning to draw attention well beyond Devapura.

Watch
A day in the life
of a Digipreneur



Digipreneur Sharath at his digikiosk, serving 3,000 people across eight villages every month.

You've come a long way. What were you doing before the Digipreneur program?

After a BCom with distinction, I went to Bangalore and worked as a contract laborer, then at a non-banking finance company. The salary wasn't enough to live on. So I returned to my village. My father had a small tractor; I drove that and also ran a small chicken shop, earning roughly ₹300 a day in profit and ₹10,000 per month. I was educated, but nothing was working out. I grew frustrated.

Then my classmates Kiran and Basavaraj saw a newspaper ad for the Digipreneur program. They applied and told me to do the same.

What was your first reaction when you heard about it?

I thought it was one of those schemes where they ask you to bring more people and pay some money. I told the TIDE team: if that's what this is, I don't want it. But they were very clear—this is not a chain link; we will train you, help you build something. I believed them. I went for the interview, got selected, and then underwent four days of residential training. Before that, I was a zero. Now I am a hero. *(beams happily)*

What did the training involve, and how much did you already know going in?

I knew how to switch the laptop on and off. That's it. Online applications, government portals—none of that. But in four days, the program covered basic computer skills, digital schemes, government service applications, how to talk to people, how to read a customer, and how to bring someone back to calm if they walk in angry. Everything I know now, I learned there.

The next day after training, TIDE and Microland Foundation gave me a laptop, a biometric device, a printer—on subsidized price. I set up the digikiosk right in front of my house.

Do you remember your first customer?

Rakshita, a first-year PUC student, came to apply for an SSP (State Scholarship Portal) scholarship. It took me four hours for that one application. Rangaswamy sir from the TIDE team helped me through every step. Now the same thing takes just two minutes.

In those early days I would hesitate—should I call the team or not? Then they told me: call us anytime, even at midnight. Your customer should not go back without

getting good service. That stayed with me.

How many customers does Pratiksha Digital Service Kendra serve today?

Around 3,000 every month. When I started, people in my own village barely knew me. Now I support eight villages. People come to me for all kinds of services. Aadhaar, Farmer ID, Xerox, photo printouts, government welfare schemes—everything. I have a CSC ID for central government services, and for state schemes, I work with other Digipreneurs in my cohort who have GramaOne IDs. We process together through our WhatsApp group. That way, no customer leaves without their work done.

Launched in April 2022 in Tumkur, Karnataka, Digipreneur is a Microland Foundation initiative implemented in partnership with Technology Informatics Design Endeavour (TIDE). It trains ambitious young people from underserved communities to deliver digital services and government schemes at the last mile—turning them into local entrepreneurs and grassroots changemakers.

“We value our partnership with Microland Foundation. Their collaborative, solution-oriented approach and commitment to ‘not leaving anyone behind’ have helped create meaningful digital livelihoods and reach more communities. We look forward to expanding this impact.”

Ravichandran K
Consultant, TIDE

Digipreneur

We also heard someone call you a mobile ATM. Is that correct?

Yes. Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS) transactions are one of my main services. I go to surrounding villages early in the morning, sometimes late in the evening, and withdraw pension or MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) amounts for senior citizens at their doorstep. I go to them.

My wife handles the kiosk when I'm out. She became a DigiSahayak through the program. Ask her, and she'll proudly say, "I am the DigiSahayak of Prathiksha Kiosk." (he breaks into a wide smile)

That's a real family enterprise. Can you share one moment where your work made a difference you won't forget?

There was a man in my village eligible for a government disability pension. Someone had asked him for ₹5,000 to process it. He came to me. I told him ₹200 is my service charge and ₹40 is the government fee, nothing more.

I applied through the portal. The application went to the panchayat secretary for approval. During a field visit,

the secretary came to my house and said, "Why are you applying this through your login? Why didn't you come to my office?" I told him I got training from Microland Foundation and TIDE, and that under Digital India, no physical submission is required. He threatened to reject it. I told him there is a portal called Sakala, and if he rejected an eligible application, I would file a complaint.

Within three days, it was approved. That man now receives his pension every month, without paying a single rupee in bribe.

That's good to hear. And how has all of this changed life for you and your family?

Three months into the program, my income became stable. Now I earn ₹30,000 to ₹40,000 every month, minimum. I'm building a 1,200 sq ft house on my farm, which costs around ₹20 lakhs. I also bought a car. All of this in two years.

There are three other computer centers in my village, but customers still come to me, sometimes waiting seven days when I'm closed because they know that others might cheat them.

"People who migrated to coffee estates in south Karnataka send their wages directly to Sharath's account, not to their own families. They trust him that much. And when there's an emergency, he extends credit."

Rangaswamy G
Project Coordinator, TIDE



Prathiksha, meaning hope. For the families across villages who depend on it, the name has proven apt.

You also have 23,000+ Facebook and 11,000+ Instagram followers. How did that happen?

I started making short videos about government schemes—how to apply, what documents you need. One video on Aadhaar KYC for the PM Kisan scheme got 1.6 lakh views. After that, the agriculture department started calling me to make videos when they launch new schemes. Now I get applications from Ballari, Belgaum—across Karnataka. A brick manufacturer recently gave me ₹10,000 in cash after I made a reel for his business. The Kisan group in Karnataka has appointed me as their social media coordinator.

So, what's next for you?

A computer coaching center. My customers' idea, really. They said the nearest one is 15 kilometers away. So that should open in the next month or two.

My kiosk is near the bus stop. People don't wait at the bus stand anymore—they wait at my kiosk. When I'm closed, they ask: *Where is he? When's he opening?* I want to continue being that person for this village. Someone they can count on, always.

One of Sharath's methods for reaching people: play folk songs at the kiosk, wait for people to gather, then tell them about the latest government schemes. It works every time.

"Other centers apply and hand over the acknowledgement. We don't stop there. Microland Foundation and TIDE trained us to follow up—to go to the department, push for approval, and make sure the benefit actually reaches the person."

Saraswathi
Digipreneur and Founder,
Sri Chamundeshwari Digital Seva Kendra,
Madalur, Tumkur District



Two years ago, Sharath was driving his father's tractor for a living. Today, he's building a home and has a car to show for it.

Scan the QR code to listen to voices related to this piece.



You can find Sharath on

i_am_your_sharu_official i.am.your.sharu

The Digipreneur program currently has 62 active Digipreneurs, including Sharath and Saraswathi. Behind each Digipreneur is a community, a village, a *hobli* that no longer has to travel far to get things done.



Sector HEALTH

Enabling Access to Quality Healthcare

Access to quality healthcare remains uneven across the Nilgiris, especially in remote tribal hamlets. Our work focuses on bridging these gaps through community-led, technology-enabled systems of care. From palliative care and nutrition programs to point-of-care diagnostics delivered directly to the doorstep, we aim to improve continuity of care, enable early intervention, and support caregivers and communities where they are.

400+ Villages covered **2,000+** Patients reached per month **40+** Healthcare workers trained **06** NTs placed in government roles

Point of Care

2,000+ Total community members reached **82** Total villages serviced **1,000** POC tests done **12** Nurse Technicians trained **382** Training sessions conducted

Lawley Hospital

Ranked **#1** among **11** hill hospitals **26,000 → 40,000/month** Diagnostic tests
05 → 13 (+160%) Doctors on staff **+14% (~650 patients/day)** OPD growth Hospital utilisation doubled in **08** months

Palliative Care

248 Patient families supported **06** In-patients **88** Outpatients **215** Home visits **67** Monthly medicines & tests

Project Nourish

300+ Total malnourished children reached **17 → 13** Severely Underweight cases **19 → 17** Severe Stunting cases **07 → 08** Severe Acute Malnutrition cases



The Power of Community-Led Care

In many tribal villages in the Nilgiris, anemia-related fatigue is so familiar it becomes background noise—something people live with rather than treat. For families across two communities and four hamlets, that began to change when Microland Foundation, in collaboration with Astitva, introduced *Project Thrive* at the community level.

In the Kurumba hamlet, people can now speak about anemia from A to Z.

– Nivetha, Program Manager at Astitva

Twenty community members were trained to test hemoglobin levels, guide supplementation, and support families through the process. The results spoke clearly: anemia prevalence dropped by 69.4%, nearly 90.5% of participants saw improved hemoglobin levels, and program retention held at 96%. The district administration took notice, and what followed was bigger.

Instead of wiping the floor where the tap is overflowing, we should close the tap first.

– Nikhil Hari, Project Manager at Astitva, on the program's philosophy

Project Nourish, now supported by Microland Foundation, applies the same community-first model to child malnutrition—one of the most persistent health challenges in underserved communities. In its first three months, 110 children were enrolled, with 95 continuing consistently through the program. The work is intensive: daily follow-ups, growth monitoring, home-based care, and deep engagement with caregivers. Insights from other Microland Foundation-supported initiatives continue to inform its approach—from community-led care to digital tools for tracking and follow-up.

Change at this scale is gradual—but it is already visible. Severe underweight cases have begun to decline. Some children have moved from severe



In the tribal hamlets of the Nilgiris, malnutrition shapes the early lives of many children. Project Nourish is working to rewrite that story.

to moderate categories. Caregivers are cooking with greater intention, revisiting traditional ingredients, and making nutrition part of daily life rather than a one-time instruction.

In just over three months, Project Nourish is demonstrating impact beyond a health intervention. It shows what becomes possible when communities are supported long enough to begin investing in themselves.

How a Hill Town Government Hospital Became the Region's Most Trusted

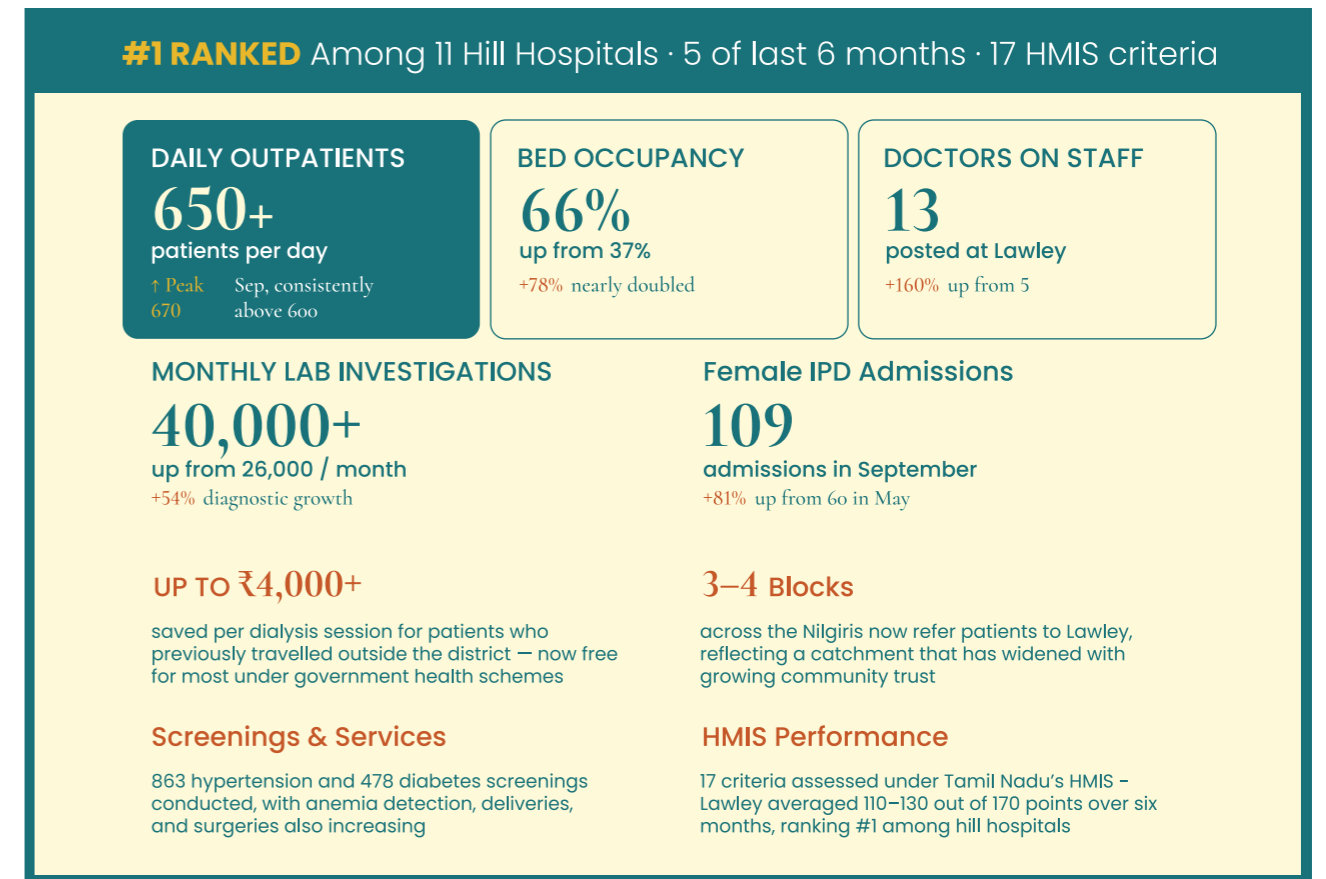
There was a time when patients from the Nilgiris avoided the government hospital in Coonoor altogether. The wards were worn, the facilities stretched, and doctors—reluctant to work in under-resourced conditions—were few. Families travelled hours to seek care elsewhere, often at great cost. Though centrally located and serving a wide catchment, Lawley Hospital remained underutilized. Today, it ranks No. 1 among 11 hill hospitals in Tamil Nadu—a transformation shaped by sustained investment, partnership, and the rebuilding of community trust.



Upgraded infrastructure with skid-proof flooring, improved lighting, dedicated spaces for caregivers, clean beds, and protective mesh installations to enhance patient comfort and security. Lawley Hospital is now a place where care feels visible in every corner.

Over successive years, Microland Foundation partnered with Lawley to rebuild the hospital's capacity and standards of care. Upgrades progressed from the

casualty unit to the OPD, dialysis unit, female ward, and now the fully renovated male inpatient ward—reshaping how the hospital functions today.



The Shift in Perception

Patients who once avoided public hospitals are returning. Staff feel a greater sense of pride in where they work. A patient in the renovated female ward told a visitor the facility felt like a private hospital. A nurse spoke of the dignity restored through disability-friendly washrooms and a roof that no longer leaks.

"I've seen the transformation from the very beginning—from when the casualty was a converted horse shed to what it is today. The profile of patients has changed. The doctors want to be there. The nurses take pride in their workspace.

I've worked with various companies that have done more than ₹15 crore worth of work in the Nilgiris. Money can come from different quarters. But what sets Microland Foundation apart is their involvement. They're not in it for the short run. They don't cut corners. They are not just here till the ribbon is cut. I don't consider them a Bangalore-based company anymore. For me, they are Nilgiris-based."

Radhika Shastry, a Coonoor-based entrepreneur, social impact leader, and community advocate whose work has been featured on the Prime Minister's *Mann Ki Baat*. She has partnered with Microland Foundation on both the female and male inpatient ward renovations at Lawley.

Today, Lawley stands as a critical institutional anchor for the wider *Pain-Free Nilgiris* initiative (see page 40).

Extending Palliative Care Beyond the Hospital

In the Nilgiris, distance can keep even basic treatment out of reach, especially for people living with long-term or serious illness. Through its partnership with Kotagiri Medical Fellowship Hospital, Microland Foundation is helping change that by taking palliative care directly to families in remote communities. The initiative is making support more consistent through home visits, follow-ups, pain management, caregiver guidance, and access to medicines and tests, so care continues beyond the hospital.



Palliative care cannot be self-sustaining unless the community is involved. Once people see its value, they will step in.

— Dr. Miriam, KMF Hospital

For families like Mani's*, that continuity matters. Alongside her daily work, she has spent years caring for her children with cerebral palsy, largely on her own. In another household, Leela*, who cannot walk by herself, cares for her cousin Sneha, feeding her, cleaning her, and making sure she is okay. For a while, support came only in fragments. Now, regular visits are helping make care steadier and more dependable.

The program has already reached 300+ families through 215 home visits and 88 outpatient consultations. Around 67 patients are receiving ongoing support with medicines and tests. Across more than 480 kilometers, teams are ensuring that care keeps reaching families in places where access remains a challenge.



Strengthening Care and Expanding Reach

Shaped by what families say they need most, this model is helping ease pressure on caregivers and making palliative care more effective after a hospital visit. Backed in part by Microlanders through Culture of Giving, the effort is also building momentum to extend this model across the Nilgiris district.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.



The Magic is in the Field

Two Nurse Technicians attend to an elderly resident during a home visit. Trained Adivasi women from the communities they serve. They speak the language and understand what it takes to earn trust at the doorstep.

Across the forested hills of Gudalur in the Nilgiris, more than 300 villages sit scattered—many over 15 kilometers from the nearest hospital. For Adivasi communities here, distance is not just geographical. It is financial, cultural, and deeply historical. Seeking care has often meant losing a day's wages, hiring transport, and navigating a system that does not speak their language or understand their world.

ASHWINI's Point of Care (POC) program, supported by Microland Foundation since 2024, was built on a foundational shift: if the community will not come to care, care must go to the community.

Today, young women trained as Nurse Technicians carry diagnostic kits into hamlets that formal medicine rarely reached. They conduct check-ups, run diagnostics, facilitate telemedicine consultations, and manage referrals. But what is making the Adivasi community open its doors to these young women, when it has historically kept formal medicine at arm's length?

Dr. Patrick, who works closely with the Nurse Technicians in the field, answers matter-of-factly. "Very simple. The young women are from the Adivasi community, and they are trying to identify the problem and solve it at the doorstep as far as possible. That is the success behind this thing."

He recalls a near-miss from the field—that of a woman who could not walk for a week, sustained largely on rice and salt, her muscles giving out in silence. A village health guide alerted the team. A Nurse Technician visited, assessed her in the field, and through digital

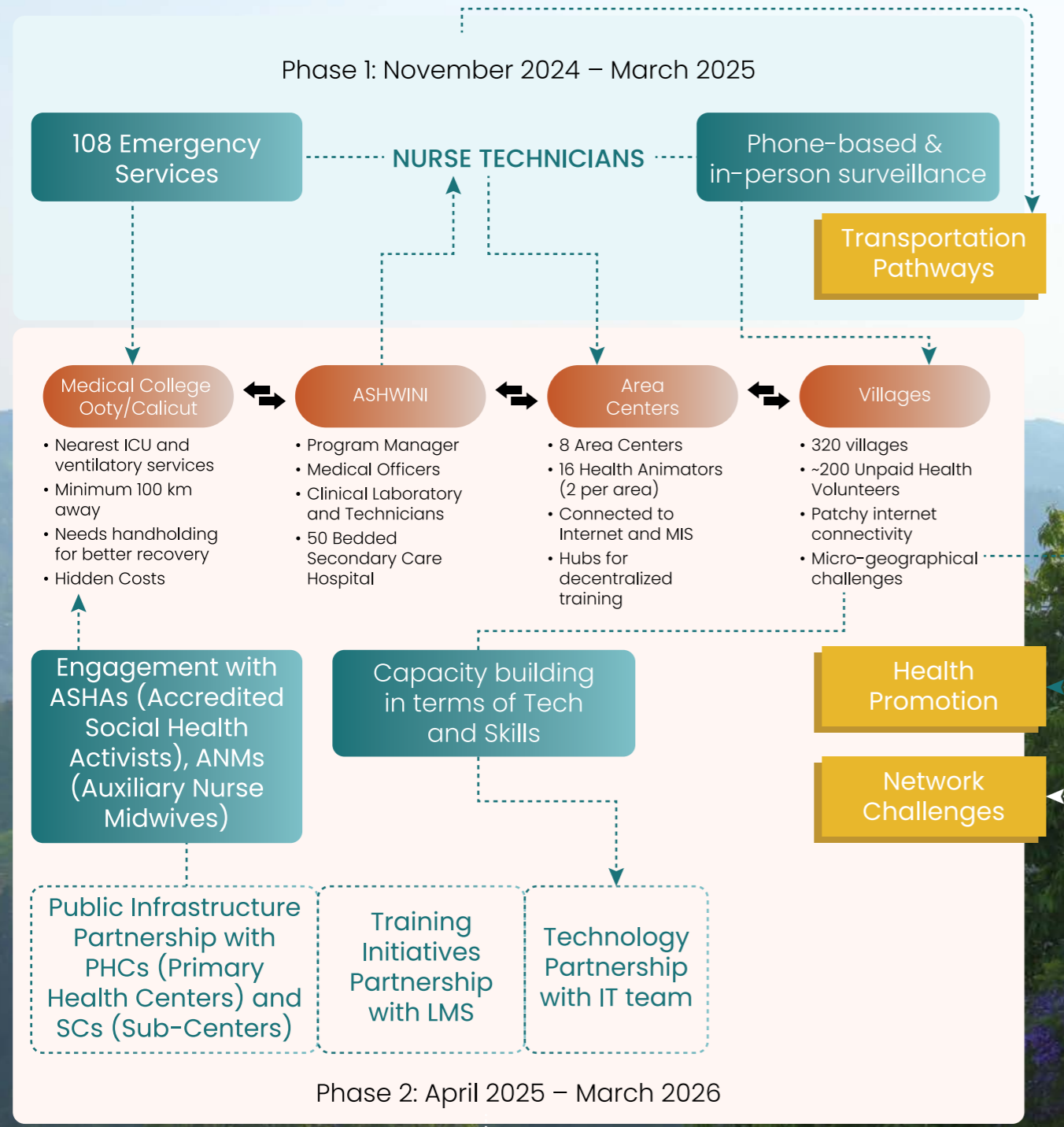
consultation and basic tests identified severe potassium deficiency causing periodic paralysis. Within days of starting supplementation, she regained mobility. "The magic," Dr. Patrick says, "is in the understanding, in the field. You have to have a force which is trained enough to take a certain amount of decisions in the field."

What is at work here is a technology-enabled, truly community-embedded healthcare system.



A plastic surgeon by training, Dr. Patrick works alongside Nurse Technicians in the field—supporting real-time decisions and bridging doorstep care with the hospital.

Point of Care: An Interconnected Tribal Healthcare Delivery Framework



The Connected Care Stack

METABASE: Live project dashboards for monitoring programs, guiding decisions, and driving action



AVNI: An offline data collection and retrieval system used on smartphones, used by NTs, for patient assessment

BAHMNI: A centralized hospital system integrating Avni's field data for seamless patient data management

Some Nurse Technicians have since moved into government roles, carrying their skills and digital fluency into the public health system. Others are still in the field, building this network in real time.

VIDYA was the first in her family to finish 12th standard. After completing her Auxiliary Nurse Midwife course at the ASHWINI Adivasi Nursing School, she found herself at home, uncertain of what came next. Her parents did not want her leaving Gudalur for the city. Then she heard the POC program needed Nurse Technicians. She said yes, and her life turned.

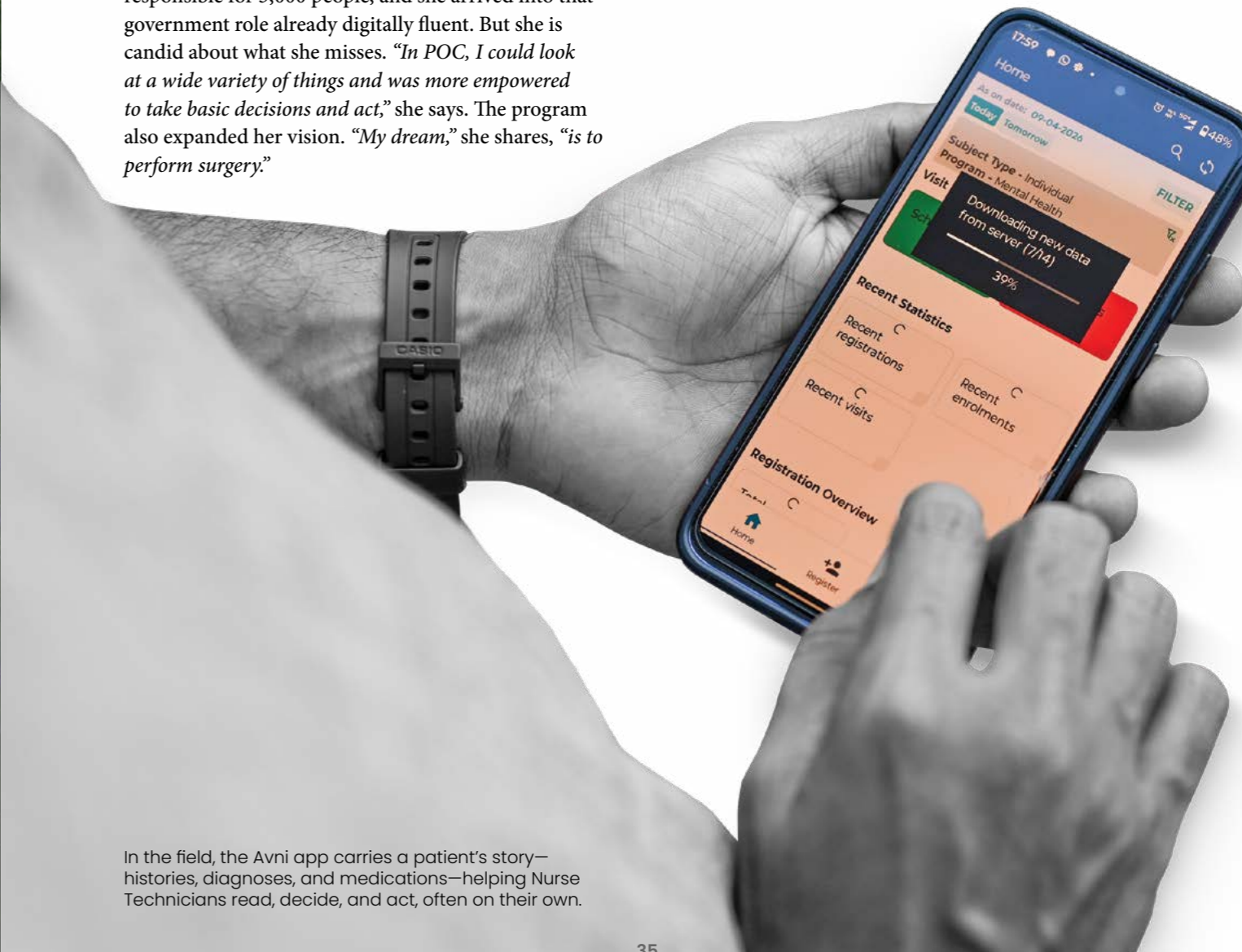
For a year and a half, her days were defined by movement—checking in with village health guides, listening for who needed attention, then going. In the field, the Avni app gave her access to patient histories, previous diagnoses, and current medications, allowing her to read a situation in real time, often alone, often without connectivity. That authority—to assess, decide, and act—is what set POC apart from anything she had done before.

Today she is a Village Health Nurse in Kotagiri, responsible for 3,000 people, and she arrived into that government role already digitally fluent. But she is candid about what she misses. *“In POC, I could look at a wide variety of things and was more empowered to take basic decisions and act,”* she says. The program also expanded her vision. *“My dream,”* she shares, *“is to perform surgery.”*

SINDHU is twenty. She grew up in Srimadurai, in a Paniya tribal family with two elder sisters, a younger brother, and a mother who raised them alone after their father died when she was in 2nd standard. To get to school, Sindhu would climb a hill every morning, cross elephant territory, then climb another hill on the other side. She did this twice a day, for years.

Watching cousins and others from her community in nursing drew her to enroll in the ANM course. Being a recipient of Microland Foundation's DigiShiksha scholarship meant she could continue—without her mother carrying the weight of fees. *“When she entered in 2023, she was very quiet,”* recalls Principal Sudha. *“Even if we asked the answer, she wouldn't talk. Now she's very fluent and comfortable talking to patients.”*

Training introduced her to the full arc of community health—antenatal and postnatal care, and how to speak to people in their own spaces about their health. She is now a new POC recruit, learning to visit villages alone, triage via the Avni app, and make decisions once requiring a doctor's presence.



In the field, the Avni app carries a patient's story—histories, diagnoses, and medications—helping Nurse Technicians read, decide, and act, often on their own.

Point of Care

One moment stays with her: she once visited a home, spent time with a family, and persuaded a reluctant patient to come to the hospital. *“Convincing a patient in our community is not easy,”* Sindhu says. *“It takes trust, confidence, and time with the family to help them understand and agree.”* When she brought the patient in, doctors told her it was exactly the right time—something that made her very happy.

Her sights are already set further. *“I want to build awareness around rising cancer cases and alcohol-related harm in my community.”*



Once hesitant to speak, Sindhu now steps into homes, builds trust, and brings those in need to care.



A nurse attends to a patient at the ASHWINI Gudalur Adivasi Hospital. Many of ASHWINI's nurses are Auxiliary Nurse Midwives trained at the ASHWINI Adivasi Nursing School — young women from the same tribal communities they now serve.



Dr. Dhanya, Director, ASHWINI Hospital. A dentist by training who grew into the full breadth of community health work, she has spent a decade here — moving between the clinic, the field, and every conversation in between.

The Point of Care program that shaped both Sindhu and Vidya has steadily evolved through sustained partnership.

“Because Microland Foundation in a way already knew our work, it was really easy,” says Dr. Dhanya, Director at ASHWINI Hospital. *“They would nudge us and ask the right questions to improve our work—be it the data collection questionnaire, the form design, how the flow would be, how we can improve.”* She reflects on how much the collaboration pushed ASHWINI's own thinking. *“We never thought of including the training module initially. That came out of the discussions with the Microland team. And we wouldn't have thought of expanding into one-on-one care at this level had it not been for this partnership.”*

The vehicle donated by Microland Foundation now carries the diagnostic kits into terrain that hired jeeps couldn't always reliably reach. Beyond infrastructure, the Foundation's technical guidance helped shape the Avni forms that the nurse technicians use daily, with decision-support built directly into the field workflow.

“A lot of the tests can be done then and there, the patient need not be brought in always,” Dr. Dhanya says. *“Everything can be done in the field. I think we have moved way ahead.”*

The next phase is already in view: dialysis awareness, deeper technology integration, structured nurse technician internships. The architecture of a connected tribal health network is being built steadily, village by village, visit by visit. And across 300 villages in Gudalur, the clinic has finally come to the doorstep—with young women from the community leading the way.



ASHWINI Gudalur Adivasi Hospital—a place where community-rooted care connects back to clinical support, completing the circle.

Scan the QR code to listen to voices related to this piece.



Inclusion by Design

Reimagining Indigenous Healthcare in the Nilgiris

Dr. Ajith J S is a community health practitioner with ASHWINI (Association for Health Welfare in the Nilgiris), working in Gudalur at the intersection of indigenous health, public systems, and social justice. Drawing from years on the ground, he argues that systems built without community participation will always fall short, and that true inclusion—far beyond tokenism—is the only foundation on which a connected, responsive health system can be built.

Gudalur in the Nilgiris is not a remote cul-de-sac. It's a densely populated region where development, wildlife, and indigenous ways of life coexist. The five Adivasi communities I work with—the Paniyas, Kattunayakans, Bettakurumbas, Mullukurumbas, and Irulas—form less than 10% of the population. When you are a minority at that scale, your influence on policy is very limited. And rarely does anyone ask: *how do Adivasi people experience this policy?* That absence of feedback is where the system first breaks.

We tend to either exoticize or downplay what it means to live as an Adivasi. Each community has its own language, identity, and way of looking at healthcare—norms and culture that shape every decision. When we fail to account for this, we prescribe care that doesn't work. And anything shaped by a narrow, savior complex-ridden lens will end up being inadequate.



Let me put it very bluntly: we are working with a group of people who have fallen through the cracks.

What Gets Missed

'Access' is often reduced to distance. But it is also about approachability—and far more layered. A Paniya or Kattunayakan individual may not speak the language of the hospital. They navigate maze-like systems, unwelcoming interactions, and an often brutal opportunity cost—*do I accompany my sick mother, or do I earn today?* These nuances get missed, which explains why even when services exist, they remain underutilized.

Time is critical. A person can recover from a stroke or tropical illness only if they reach care within the golden hour. But here, by the time transport, money, caregiving, and arrangements at home are in place, two or three days have passed—by which point there is little the hospital can do. If the illness is serious, they are referred to a larger hospital—the very system that feels most inaccessible.

Beyond the Clinic

This is what led us to develop the Point of Care model—to reduce that turnaround time. We train nurse technicians from within the community to triage symptoms using simple tools—ECG machines, glucometers, rapid diagnostic kits. A health animator follows up, a village volunteer flags cases, and a program manager supports decision-making. Apps like Avni and Bahmni connect these layers, allowing information to flow from the field into the hospital.

This infrastructure is expandable. Add cancer screening, palliative care, or mental health—and the system will still function. Over time, data helps us move from reactive care to identifying patterns and hotspots.

This is also why *Pain-Free Nilgiris*¹ matters. Many people here live with debilitating conditions—stroke, advanced diabetes, paralysis—often without access to sustained care. This bold initiative brings together existing efforts to create a shared system for detection, risk reduction, and care. We don't have to build everything from scratch—we just need to work together.

Mental health must be part of this system. It cuts across everything we do. Suicide rates in Adivasi communities here are six to seven times higher than in non-Adivasi populations. Alcohol use isn't declining—but here, it's a symptom of a larger underlying problem. The close-knit systems that once held people together have frayed. Our response cannot be to institutionalize the problem, add five or ten more beds. We are training village-level champions to identify distress early and connect people to care. We also screen TB and sickle cell patients using a free 12-item questionnaire to catch mental distress early.

Who Gets to Inform Policy

Field efforts aside, we need to give Adivasi communities and other marginalized groups a seat at the table. Right now, inclusion is often tokenistic, and this isn't unique to India. My colleagues who work with Aborigines, with indigenous communities in Europe, feel the same. People must be able to tell their own stories. We need platforms that enable this, and from there, build homegrown knowledge banks that can inform policy.

What a Different System Can Look Like

My vision is a self-sustainable system embedded within communities and less dependent on fundraising cycles. If well-being improves, I am very confident that Adivasi communities will contribute—because they are deeply invested in one another.

I also want to build an academic and research practice within ASHWINI—one that produces knowledge from the ground, with more voices from the community. Over time, this could evolve into an Adivasi School of Public Health, where community health workers become teachers, and others come to learn how to build systems like this.

If we get this right, what we build in the Nilgiris can inform indigenous healthcare practices globally.

¹To know more, see page 40.



Augmenting Pathways for a Structured Care Economy

Pain-Free Nilgiris

Access to structured palliative care in the Nilgiris remains limited, with only a small fraction of those in need receiving consistent support. With an estimated population of around 8.83 lakh, nearly 22% of residents are elderly, making a significant portion vulnerable to chronic and degenerative conditions. Additionally, the district is home to tribal communities living in remote, hilly regions where sustained, quality care continues to be a challenge.

In response, Microland Foundation, in a public-private partnership with the Government of Tamil Nadu and the District Administration of the Nilgiris, has launched Pain-Free Nilgiris—a focused, systems-driven initiative to strengthen how care reaches those who need it most.

The program aims to improve access to palliative and geriatric care by connecting and reinforcing the district's existing public health infrastructure. The goal is to establish clearly defined systems that connect across medical facilities, creating a trained and certified care economy that improves last-mile health delivery.

A Comprehensive Healthcare Ecosystem

The program focuses on improving the quality of life for patients with chronic illnesses, cancer, post-stroke disabilities, and geriatric degenerative conditions. A hub-and-spoke care model connects healthcare facilities across the district, supported by structured referral pathways that enable smoother movement of patients across levels of care.

ASHWINI's Point Of Care program delivers tech-enabled doorstep care across 300+ villages in Gudalur, covering check-ups, diagnostics, telemedicine, and referrals. Lawley Hospital now supports over 680 outpatient visits daily, reflecting both scale and community trust.

One Step, A Giant Leap

Capacity building remains central to this approach. Doctors, nurses, ASHA workers, and community volunteers are being trained to strengthen care delivery at every level. Phase 1 of the initiative focuses on activating these systems on the ground.

Pain-Free Nilgiris

Home Care Teams

Scheduled visits with Doctors, Nurses, physiotherapists & social welfare workers

Device banks

Planned monitoring & review

Hub & Spoke Care Model

Block-level need mapping

Community-based referrals - WHVs

Need-based / targeted and integrated home care

Capacity Building

Clinical & Non-clinical capacity building

SOP Creation

Shared Services

Decentralized nodal centers for palliative care

Pain clinics, Satellite centers

Shared device banks

Tech-enabled solutions

A Movement for Collective Action in the Nilgiris

In the Nilgiris, effort is not hard to find. It lives in the work of organizations, in the commitment of institutions, and in the everyday actions of communities across the district. The challenges here are *wicked problems*: deeply tangled, cross-sectoral, and too large for any one organization to solve alone. Over time, one quiet realization began to take shape—perhaps what the Nilgiris needs is not more contributors, but stronger connections. Across the landscape, many are working towards similar goals, often in close proximity, yet not always in conversation with one another. The opportunity, then, is not to do more, but to come together.

No single organization, no single government department, no single community—none of us has the full picture. But together, we do.

— Kalpana Kar, Microland Foundation

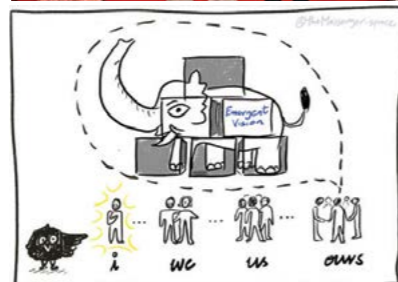


Illustration courtesy of Socratus, knowledge partner, Nilgiris Solvathon

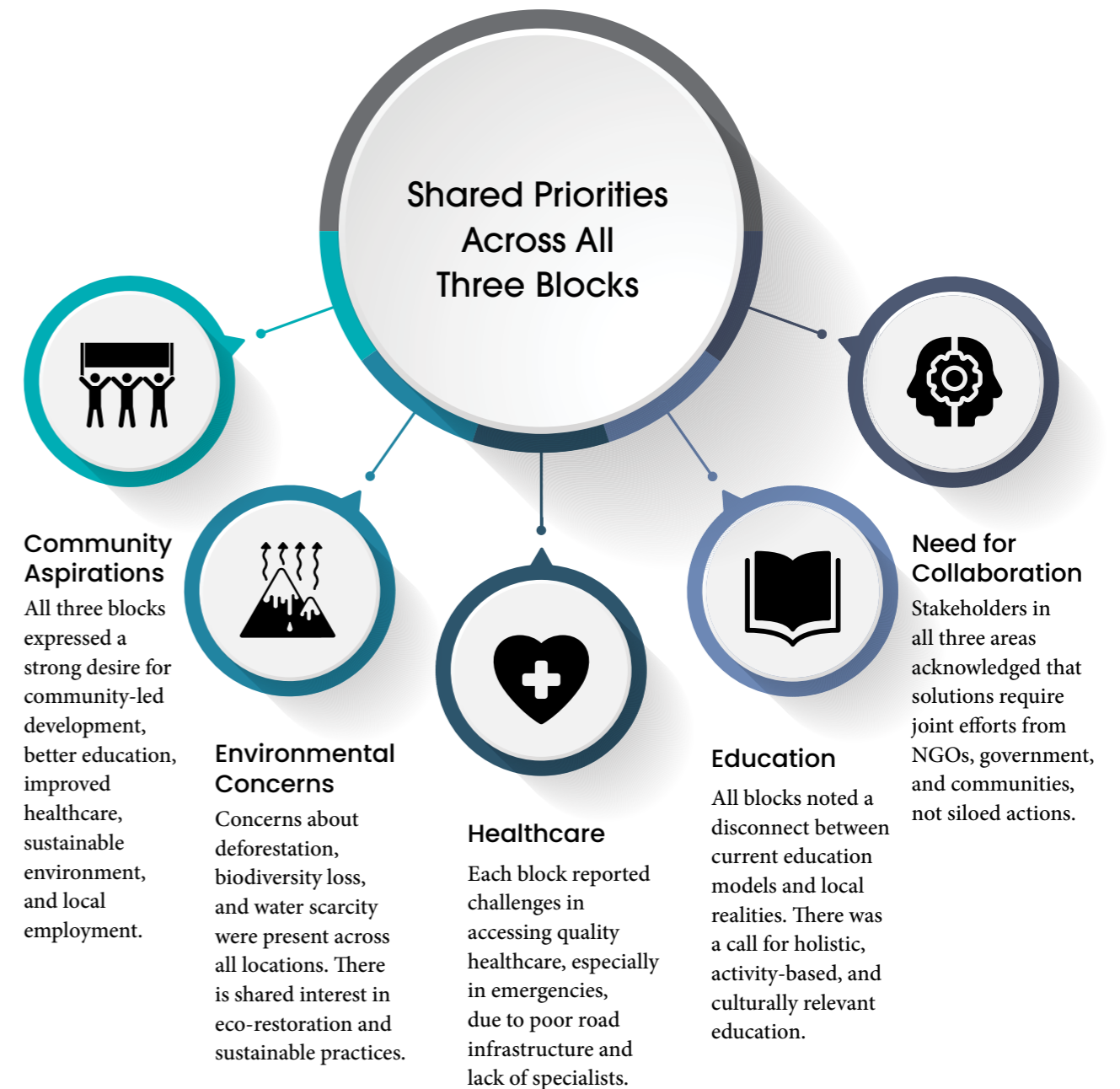


Seyalum Neelagiriyyum, meaning Collective Action for the Nilgiris, emerged in this spirit—not as a solution in itself, but as a space to ask a simple question: *What might it take for a district to begin solving problems more collectively?* It is a living, growing ecosystem where communities, civil society, government, and institutions move beyond silos and solve together.

Phase 1: Beginning with Listening

Phase 1 of Seyalum Neelagiriyyum (SN1) was an in-depth, structured act of collective inquiry, a genuine effort in understanding the region through its people. More than 130 voices from across Gudalur, Coonoor, and Kotagiri came together—civil society groups, youth, tribal leaders, community elders, entrepreneurs, educators, and health workers. Through 42 in-depth interviews and five participatory tools including the River of Life, Futures, and Recipes for Change, SN1 surfaced lived realities that no dataset alone could capture.

What SN1 Revealed



What emerged was both clear and encouraging: the Nilgiris already holds enormous insight, commitment, and local leadership. What it has lacked is a shared space to connect it all. Seyalum Neelagiriyyum is building that space.

Phase 2: Creating Space for Collective Action

Building on the insights of SN1, the second phase (SN2) focused on translating insight into early action. Stakeholders came together to define practical pathways for collaboration and execution across sectors. Seyalum Neelagiriyyum is still evolving, but four early action pathways have begun to take shape.

Nilgiris Solvathon
Learning to Solve Together

An attempt to bring organizations, practitioners, and community voices into a shared space to explore solutions to specific challenges — from waste management to public health and livelihoods. The focus is not on arriving at perfect answers, but on learning how to think, design, and act together through mentorship, collaborative design, and pilot implementation.

Nilgiris Directory
Making the Ecosystem Visible

One of the simplest, yet most significant gaps identified was visibility. Who is working where? On what? With whom? The Nilgiris Directory is being developed as a living platform to map this ecosystem — making it easier for organizations and practitioners to discover each other's work, find points of connection, and explore possibilities for collaboration.

Masterclasses
Strengthening Capacity Across the Ecosystem

Through conversations with partners, it became evident that many organizations were navigating similar gaps—in monitoring and evaluation, communication, fundraising, and partnerships. In response, Microland Foundation launched a series of masterclasses designed to equip organizations and practitioners with the practical tools to strengthen their work and engage more powerfully in collaborative initiatives. More than 250 people from the social impact space in the Nilgiris have already participated.

Shared Collaboration Space
A Hub for the Movement

Perhaps the most tangible aspiration to emerge is also the most symbolic: a shared physical space in the Nilgiris — a neutral, accessible hub where organizations, practitioners, and community leaders can meet, co-design solutions, and build the trust that complex collaboration requires. Microland Foundation is actively exploring options to establish this as a permanent home for collective action in the district.

The movement has since gradually evolved from a platform for dialogue into a framework for collective action and ecosystem strengthening across the Nilgiris.

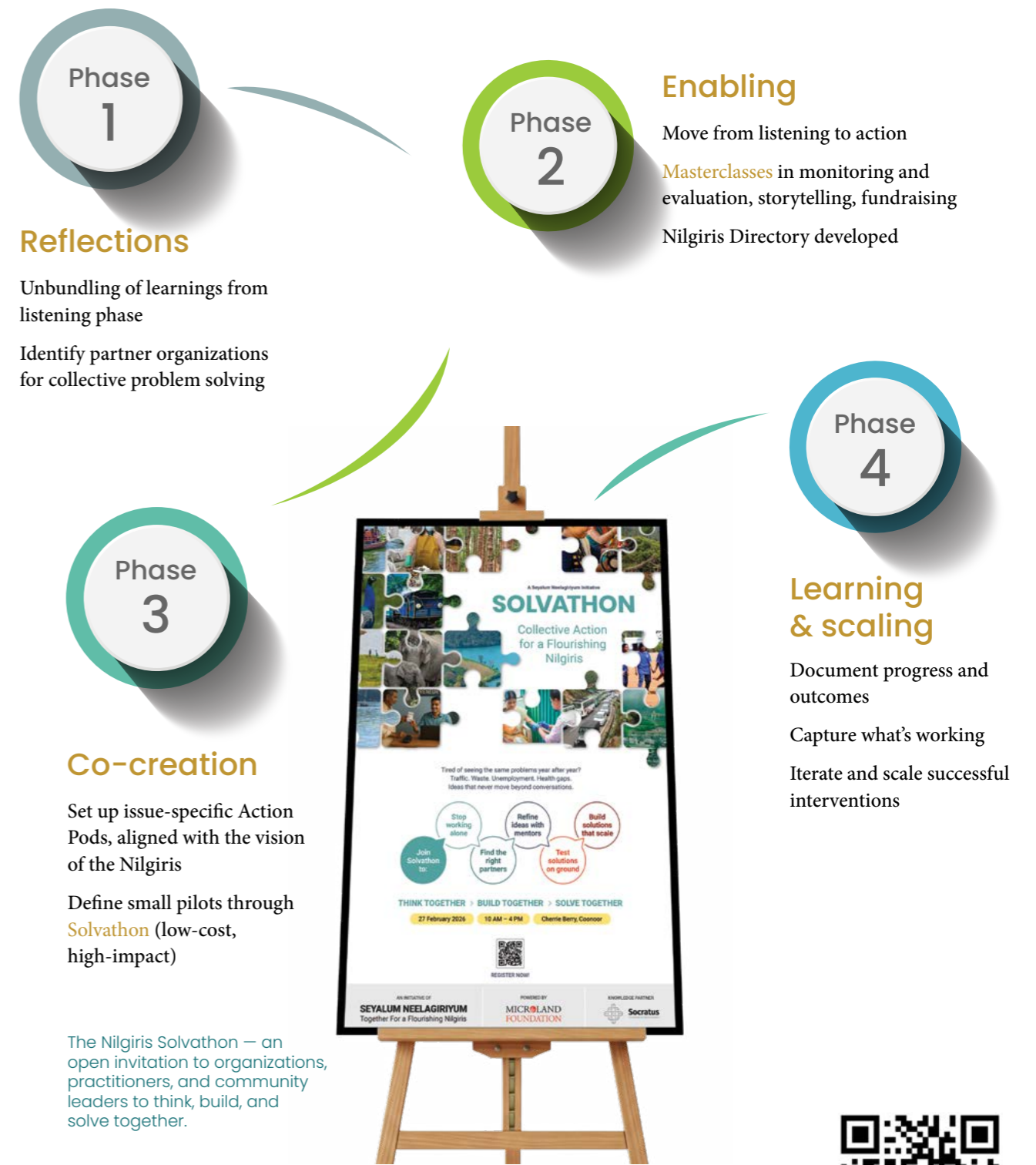
Moving Forward, Together

Building trust, alignment, and shared ownership takes time. It requires patience, consistency, and a willingness to stay with the process even when outcomes are not immediately visible.

Microland Foundation remains anchored in its role as convenor—not arriving with answers, but creating the conditions for the people who already hold them to connect, grow, and act together.

The following roadmap charts the progression from listening to action—and from individual effort to collective possibility.

The 12-Month Roadmap for SN2



The Nilgiris moves forward most powerfully when it moves together.

Scan to explore Seyalum Neelagiriyyum





URBA FARASH

AVINASH K

AMALA WARRICK



With foster home children at a Kreedashala event.

Culture of Giving: Perspectives from Within

The work of Microland Foundation isn't carried by its team and partners alone—it also finds its way into the roles of Microlanders across the organization. Not always in obvious ways. Sometimes it's in shaping a Foundation update that sparks action. Sometimes in bringing together everything needed for something to take shape, or in working through the details that ensure things hold up. And sometimes, it's about stepping into a space far removed from the everyday and figuring out what's actually needed. This is a glimpse into that, through three Microlanders and the part each of them plays.

were so happy and grateful that they can pursue what they really want. They just kept going on and on... they wouldn't stop talking. It was wonderful to see that Microland Foundation is giving them that opportunity."

The instinct to involve others has been a constant. Prior to her current role, she was involved in ISR initiatives—planning and managing drives, from blood donation to volunteering programs.

"If you've participated in something and you tell your team about it, they will want to sign up the next time. If I can influence even five people, and they influence five more, I think that's when I've succeeded."

Outside of work, Amala is drawn to animal welfare—an interest that predates her time at Microland. She has 3 cats at home and has fostered 2 kittens that were caught in a stormwater drain during a recent hailstorm.



Interacting with a palliative care patient in the Nilgiris.

AMALA WARRICK is instrumental in keeping MicrolandOne, the central space where Microlanders connect, engage, and stay informed, abuzz.

Her association with the Foundation began at a formative moment—when the idea of Culture of Giving was being shaped within the organization. She was part of the early thinking that explored how this spirit could be embedded into everyday communication.

More recently, she has played a key role in building the Microgiver module on the app—working closely with Kalpana Kar to conceptualize a system that allows employees to log their contributions from anywhere in the world, bringing visibility and recognition to individual acts of giving.

Alongside this, Amala continues to drive internal communication for the Foundation. Over time, she has seen participation evolve in tangible ways.

"From one volunteer at the first Nilgiris initiative 3–4 years ago to 50+ filling a bus for Kreedashala in Bengaluru and 250–300 applications for a CSR quiz that gave winners an opportunity to visit the Nilgiris, participation has grown. Fundraising has picked up too—we went from struggling to raise ₹2 lakhs in the early days to ₹7.38 lakhs in under a month for sports kits for foster kids during ML 36 last year. When employees are involved, that's when we see the highest level of engagement."

But it's the field visits that stay with her, such as the Kreedashala sports kits distribution event. *"The children*

URBA FARASH exercises a strong sense of rigor and responsibility while reviewing, drafting, and redlining contracts—ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.

For Microland Foundation, her work is critical in enabling initiatives to move forward with clarity and accountability. Every MOU, LOD (Letter of Donation), vendor agreement, or grant document is examined for compliance, yes, but also with care. *"While drafting or reviewing these contracts, there's always a voice active in my mind—'Urba, you need to be a little practical. You need to have that flexibility because it is for a greater cause.'"*

This stems from her October 2025 visit to the Nilgiris with the Microland Foundation team. At the Lawley Hospital dialysis center, conversations with patients brought back personal memories. *"I consider myself a strong person yet the experience overwhelmed me emotionally. It reminded me that access to basic necessities, especially healthcare, is still a distant reality for many."*

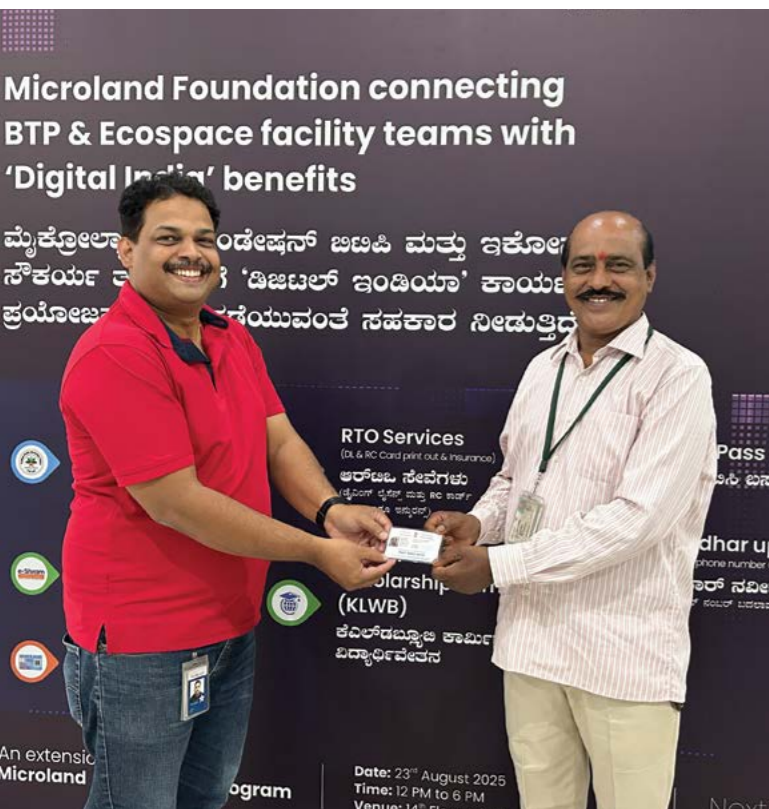
Microlanders in Action

She also met STEAM Smart students building solutions for their communities. She recalls the early-warning AI Wildlife Detection system created by Fathima. *“She has not only thought about herself, but she has solved a larger problem for her community.”*

There were other moments—meeting sanitation workers doing what she calls a “thankless job,” listening to Dr. Vasanthan explain the work on the ground, sitting with palliative care patients in their homes... *“It was a privilege to witness firsthand the impact of the Foundation’s work. It will remain with me for the rest of my life.”*

She returned to Bengaluru with a deeper sense of connection. *“I know who we are interacting with now. The beneficiaries, the partners. That soft corner is there.”*

As a student, Urba would contribute small amounts from her daily allowance to the Red Cross. Today, that early instinct informs how she shows up as a Microgiver.



Facilitating the Digipreneur camp for service staff from Microland and from Bagmane World Technology Center.

AVINASH K brings over two decades of experience in facilities and support management, leading complex infrastructure and operations at Microland. As Senior Director, his work spans everything from designing office spaces—the most recent being Microland’s AI Center of Excellence—to ensuring seamless day-to-day functioning across environments. An approach that carries into his work with Microland Foundation.

At Providence College in the Nilgiris, what began as a modest lab was reimagined entirely. Within 25–30 days, the space was transformed into a fully functional IT lab, featuring new flooring, structured electrification, concealed cabling, and systems spanning UPS, safety, and surveillance. It was a complete rebuild, executed end-to-end.

Materials were sourced across cities when local access fell short. Vendors were identified, negotiated with and verified. Every decision, from the pricing of tiles to the quality of equipment, was examined closely and never handed off. *“We don’t just give money and step away... we get into the root of what is actually needed.”*

A last-minute requirement before the inauguration meant coordinating a print job in Coimbatore, routing it overnight via bus, and having it collected at 2 am in Coonoor—so that everything was in place before the morning event.

As Somya Trivedi from Microland Foundation shares, *“Give Avinash a Wednesday-evening brief for a Friday event, and he’ll have everything ready by Thursday. That’s how reliable he and his team are.”*

At a Digipreneur camp at Bagmane World Technology Center, what started as a planned outreach for around 100 people quickly expanded to over 350—support staff and their families accessing essential services, from ID updates to government schemes, in a single day.

And at Kreedashala, even something as straightforward as distributing sports kits became an exercise in care. Instead of placing a bulk order, his team worked through multiple sourcing rounds—negotiating directly with vendors, testing materials, even sending samples from Tiruppur to meet quality specifications.

To study his work over the years, it is clear that the effort isn’t incidental but his principled way of working.

His ability to operate across regions—often switching between languages to build trust with local vendors—adds another layer to that process, making collaboration easier and helping meet deadlines where it otherwise wouldn’t be possible.

Project by project, he stays closely involved in the work—until it delivers what it’s meant to. Beneath all of it sits a consistent intent. *“Anything we do, we want to make an impact.”*

For Avinash, being a Microgiver is an extension of him being a Microlander—where the same rigor, the same attention to detail, is directed towards something larger than the immediate task at hand.



Sector

ENVIRONMENT

Creating Sustainable, Community-Led Solutions

In ecologically sensitive regions like the Nilgiris, caring for the environment calls for a thoughtful, systems-wide approach. Our focus is on improving how waste management works on the ground—through decentralized models, workforce capacity building, and closer alignment between institutions and communities. The goal is consistency, shared ownership, and solutions that endure.

Beyond operational priorities, the Environment focus also seeks to deepen ecological awareness and responsibility. This includes encouraging people to understand the natural world around them, the pressures placed on it, and the choices that can help protect it. By nurturing environmental consciousness among students and local participants, the effort supports a wider culture of care, one where conservation, climate sensitivity, and respect for natural ecosystems become a part of everyday thinking.

18+

Panchayats covered

03

Resource Recovery Centers supported



Rethinking Waste in the Nilgiris: A Systems Perspective

Manjula N. Rao is a Solid Waste Management expert with 20+ years of experience in urban infrastructure, decentralized systems, and capacity building. She has worked across government, urban local bodies, consulting, and social enterprises, leading waste system design and implementation under national and state programs. She advises Microland Foundation's Environment and SWM portfolio. In this piece, she reflects on her work in the Nilgiris and what it takes to build lasting change.



Manjula N. Rao (fifth from left) with Kalpana Kar and team, presenting the district SWM strategy to the District Collector of the Nilgiris.

When you work in a landscape like the Nilgiris, you begin to realize that waste is not just a sanitation issue—it is an ecological one.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to closely engage with waste management systems across the district: panchayats, town municipalities, and processing units. What emerged was not a lack of effort or even infrastructure, but a deeper systems challenge. Collection mechanisms exist. Processing centers are in place. Yet outcomes remain inconsistent.

The question, then, is not what is missing—but what is not working together.

In ecologically sensitive regions, waste behaves differently. High moisture affects composting. Terrain complicates transportation. Tourism creates unpredictable spikes in the volume of waste, along with changes in its composition. Solutions designed for urban environments often fail to adapt. This is where the conversation must shift from infrastructure to systems.

A system that works in the Nilgiris depends on how infrastructure, processes, and people are aligned, and on whether strong institutional support exists to sustain that alignment. One of the most encouraging aspects of working here has been the proactive role of the district administration. Decisions move. Collaboration is encouraged. There is genuine openness to learning from what works elsewhere. The allocation of land by the municipality for the Clean Coonoor unit, for instance, reflects how governance can actively strengthen implementation—a shift from parallel functioning to aligned effort.

In this context, partnerships are not supplementary. They are the architecture.

Working alongside Microland Foundation, the focus has been on strengthening existing systems rather than building new ones. In Coonoor, efforts have gone into improving operational efficiency across the value chain—from collection and segregation to processing—ensuring that systems function consistently, not intermittently.

Masinagudi: Citizens Strengthening What Exists

At Masinagudi, the Resource Recovery Center offers a clear example of what system strengthening can look like in practice. The Masinagudi Eco Naturalist Club—a volunteer-run collective of friends who grew up in this village—took over a site that was, at the time, little more than a dump yard. With support from Microland Foundation and in partnership with the local panchayat, they built it into a functioning operation. Twenty-two workers now run daily collection routes across the village and eight surrounding settlements. Seventy percent of households segregate waste. Late evening collection runs have reduced wildlife—elephants, bears, wild boars—from entering the village at night.

What changed was not just efficiency, but ownership. When systems begin to work reliably, the people managing them begin to take greater pride in them. And that is often the point where sustainability begins.

"Without Microland Foundation, we would never have gotten off the ground. It wasn't just the financial support—it was the ideas. For Daniel and Abid (Vice President, MENC), it was a clean slate. Bit by bit, they learned."

- Shahanaz, Treasurer, MENC

"We want to make Masinagudi a role model—not just for the Nilgiris, but for India."

- Daniel, President, MENC



Sanitation workers in front of the Resource Recovery Center. Among the many who keep Masinagudi clean.

Systems Perspective on Waste

Building SWM Capacity in the Nilgiris with District Administration and TNSDC

A critical gap identified across the district was capacity. Waste management is often seen as routine labor rather than a skilled function, yet the effectiveness of any system depends on the people who run it. In response, Microland Foundation, with the District Collectorate and the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation, launched a structured certification program for over 1,300 sanitation workers and sanitary inspectors across the Nilgiris. This marked a shift from task-based execution to skill-based system management. Early results are visible: better segregation, improved compliance, and stronger ownership on the ground.

The Role of Public-Private Partnership

One lesson stands out: in regions like the Nilgiris, public-private partnerships are foundational, not

optional. No single institution can manage the complexity of waste systems alone. It requires alignment between administration, local bodies, implementation partners, and communities. When this alignment holds, systems stabilize.

Waste systems do not fail because they are absent. They fail because they are not owned.

The Nilgiris does not need louder solutions, but more responsive ones—solutions that respect terrain, adapt to climate, and align with ecological limits. What is emerging is not new models, but stronger existing ones, working as they were meant to. In places like these, the question is not just how we manage waste, but how we choose to live with the land.

Microland Foundation: Building Capacity for Rural-Urban Solid Waste Management

**ANCHOR INITIATIVE
Clean Coonoor · Center of Excellence**

The Foundation's flagship SWM intervention. Established end-to-end systems for segregation, wet waste processing, dry waste recycling, and scientific reject disposal. Serves as the proof-of-concept and knowledge source for all subsequent programs across the Nilgiris.

**SCALING THE MODEL
Clean Masinagudi**

Peri-urban, tourism-driven area generating ~13 tons of waste per day. Community-owned model run by MENC in partnership with Masinagudi Panchayat. Covers the village and 8 surrounding forest settlements. Incinerator, baling machine, and resource recovery infrastructure in place.

**SYSTEM-LEVEL CAPACITY
Clean Nilgiris SWM Professional Certification Program**

In collaboration with the Rural Development Organisation and Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation, Microland Foundation has supported the structured reskilling of 1,300 sanitation workers and supervisors—covering occupational safety, new SWM rules, segregation, field monitoring, and Swachh Survekshan reporting systems.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION
A replicable model for hill districts**

The Nilgiris approach—combining infrastructure, community ownership, institutional partnerships, and workforce professionalization—is designed to be replicated. Masinagudi is already drawing interest from neighboring villages as a reference model for ecologically sensitive, tourism-facing geographies.

I was born and brought up in the Nilgiris, and I love this place deeply.

My father worked extensively with tribal communities in this eco-sensitive landscape—and it was he who first introduced me to what that phrase truly meant. He raised me with one simple rule: if you litter, you fix it. So, I never did.

When I used to see people polluting these hills, I always wanted to do something about it. I would tell them, "Please don't litter," and sometimes they'd say, "Who are you? Just leave." That's when I decided to find a way to be heard—with the authority of a position behind me. That's how I became a Sanitary Inspector.

My day starts at 7 in the morning, taking attendance for sanitary workers. My main wing is public health and sanitation, and every day looks different—door-to-door waste collection, managing festive seasons, guiding my team. The real challenge has always been waste that arrives unsegregated. When it's not segregated, it is simply not humane to ask sanitary workers to handle it. So I started telling residents: while you are putting waste in the bin, start segregating from there. That one small communication change has made a major difference in just two to three months.

The training supported by Microland Foundation, in partnership with TNSDC and the District Administration, gave me three things I didn't have before. First, I learned to bring local self-help groups—the *Magalir Kulus*—into our awareness work. These women know who will listen, who will act, and how to reach them. That kind of network is invaluable. Second, I digitalized my data management. I now use Google Forms to track segregated waste quantification, so after a month—after a season—I can analyze what's happening without relying on approximations. Third, and most importantly, I built relationships with village presidents and panchayat presidents I had never met before. We now exchange practical challenges and practical solutions. That network is very strong.

The new Solid Waste Management Rules 2026 have brought real clarity to our work. Earlier, e-waste and toxic materials would end up mixed into dry waste. Now we have a dedicated 'special care waste' category—making our processing cleaner, our data more accurate, and our decisions better grounded.

I don't believe in pressuring people to change. Making them realize why it matters works far better. My father taught me that.

And I don't like telling people to "save the Earth." There is nothing to save. Earth is the one nourishing us. The responsibility is simple: don't pollute it. Don't harm it.



Leesa is the Sanitary Inspector of Ketti Town Panchayat in The Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu—a mechanical engineering graduate turned frontline public health leader, who pursued a postgraduate diploma in sanitary inspection out of a lifelong commitment to protecting the hills she grew up in. She has also been trained under the Clean Nilgiris SWM Professional Certification Program.



Scan the QR code to listen to voices related to this piece.

In Appreciation of

Our work is made possible by the passion, commitment, and wisdom of many. We are deeply thankful to our partners, collaborators, and community members for their enduring trust, insight, and collaboration.

Collaboration with Government



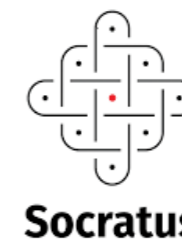
Association
For Health Welfare in the Nilgiris
(ASHWINI)



Our Valued Partners



LIGHTHOUSE
INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY



We invite changemakers, organizations, and individuals who share our vision to join us.
Together, we can deepen the impact and shape the future.
Reach out to us at contactus@microlandfoundation.org to learn more about how you can get involved.

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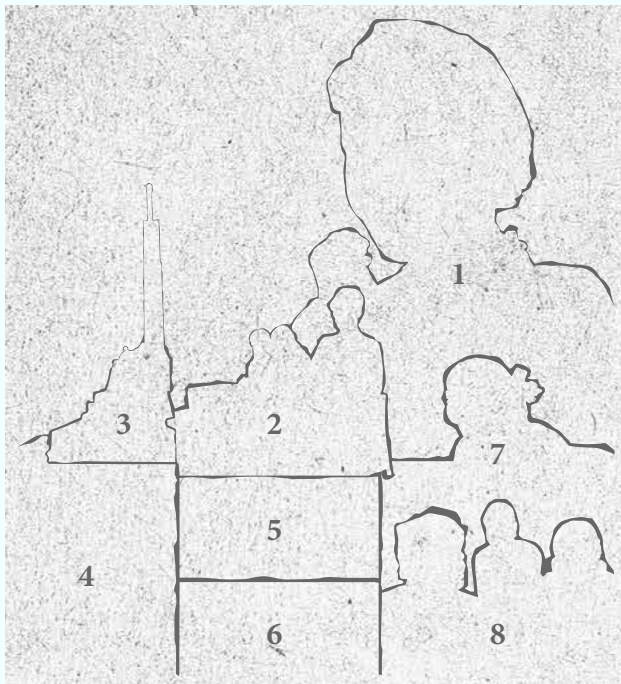
TOGETHER FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

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voices and reflections related to the
features and articles in this report.



The numbered markers correspond to images
featured on the front cover collage.



Front Cover Image Index

1 - For palliative patients, tribal communities,
and elders like her, Pain-Free Nilgiris aims to close
the last mile in healthcare.

2 - STEAM Smart students exhibiting prototypes to the jury.

3 - The incinerator at the Masinagudi Resource Recovery
Center in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu.

4 and 7 - Learning Lab students at MMS Gandhipuram,
Coonoor, Tamil Nadu, India.

5 - A Digipreneur at work, connecting underserved
communities to government schemes and services.

6 - The modernized Male In-Patient Ward at Government
Lawley Hospital, Coonoor.

8 - Point of Care Nurse Technicians conduct a routine
check-up at a tribal elder's doorstep.