

IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews

The Daily Star JOINS 49 OF THE WORLD'S LEADING NEWSPAPERS TO TELL THE

STORIES for a BETTER WORLD

JOURNALISM FOR
PROBLEM-SOLVING



50 NEWSPAPERS TELL
#STORYOFCHANGE
JOIN THE MOVEMENT



Beyond the constant stream of negative news, there are many stories of hope and concrete solutions. Stories of changemakers tackling some of the world's most pressing issues with innovative ideas, in order to change the lives of millions for the better. Stories worth reading and spreading, not only to rebalance our view of the world, but to help these existing solutions be replicated worldwide.

The media can play a crucial role in telling the individual stories behind this global movement. That's why for the last five years Sparknews has invited newspapers to take part in Impact Journalism Day, harnessing the power of collaborative journalism to bring stories of change to the surface. *The Daily Star*, which has been part of this important global platform since

2015, too believes in the power of positive, solutions-based journalism. It has been at the forefront of initiatives that recognise those individuals who are making a difference in ways big and small. One such initiative is the "Unsung Women Nation Builders Awards" which *The Daily Star* recently presented to seven incredible women for their selfless contribution to the development of Bangladesh.

Every year, newspapers taking part in Impact Journalism Day explore and publish an array of groundbreaking solutions in special supplements on the same day, reaching 120 million people worldwide in print and digital media. Many publications have come to realise the impact of these articles, and now incorporate more solutions-driven stories into their day-to-day

coverage of the world.

For the fifth edition of Impact Journalism Day, the media are joined by organisations that believe spreading these stories is a first step toward change. These include the United Nations as well as One Young World, which annually gathers together 1,500 young leaders from social and corporate sectors who are involved in positive innovations. A large community of well-known personalities and ordinary citizens have also joined the chorus in signing a manifesto to show that everyone - governments, the private sector, civil society, NGOs and everyday people - can take action for a better future. You, too, can be part of this transformational movement.

Discover those who have successfully brought answers to challenges such as

good health, access to water, quality education, decent employment and clean energy. Each serves as a concrete example of the power of individual or group initiatives to help reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity and good health for all.

We hope you enjoy the read and that you become part of the solution. Sign the manifesto (sharestoriesofchange.org) and share the stories that impress you most on Facebook and Twitter (#ImpactJournalism, #StoryOfChange, @Sparknews, @dailystarnews).

Mahfuz Anam, Editor and Publisher, *The Daily Star*
Christian de Boisredon, Founder of Sparknews and Ashoka Fellow; and The Sparknews Team

IMPACT
Journalism
Day by Sparknews

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RESPEKT Al Masry Al Youm **LE FIGARO** Mon Quotidien El Heraldo Fraternité Martin l'actu THE IRISH TIMES L'Orient LE JOUR l'express EL PAIS L'ECONOMISTE THE NATION
FOLHA DE S. PAULO *The Asahi Shimbun* DONG-A ILBO RZECZPOSPOLITA **le soleil** Kommersant THE STRAITS TIMES **Le Courrier de Russie** City PRESS
THE PHILIPPINE STAR 24 heures Times Argentin La Regione KHAO SOD THE HINDUT24 **Tribune de Genève** *The China Post* USA Today HAARETZ
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Today, 50 of the world's leading newspapers are publishing, in more than 40 countries, 60 positive innovations that are changing the world.

#StoryOfChange

Selling books at the price of bread

Through his organisation Lire C'est Partir, 'low-cost' publisher Vincent Safrat is selling children's books to disadvantaged families and, in doing so, is revolutionising the French publishing market

CAROLINE DE MALET
LE FIGARO, PARIS

Publishing disruptor Vincent Safrat is not only selling books like they're bread rolls – and at the same price as a baguette – but he's also doing so on a massive scale. In 2016 alone, Safrat sold around 2.5 million copies in France.

So what's his secret? The key lies in the price: he is able to sell each book for 80 cents, which drastically undercuts the seven euros you would pay on average for a children's book. By taking on the distribution himself – which represents around 60 percent of a book's cost – and in printing the paperbacks for only 30 cents each, Safrat has been able to achieve this innovative model.

PHOTO: VINCENT BOISOT/LE FIGARO

"I believe that reading can replace studying. Hence my idea of bringing reading to those who don't read," explains the self-taught entrepreneur who grew up in the suburbs of Paris.

In 1992, Vincent Safrat began visiting various publishing houses on a daily basis to rescue any unsold works and redistribute them for free to homes in low-income suburbs. He then started to print books at a low price and distribute them to schools, which either buy the books for their students or organise book sales for the parents. All this has been achieved without Safrat ever asking for a subsidy from the public authorities.

<https://www.lirecestpartir.fr/>



Vincent Safrat's goal is to "make read those who do not read."

Connecting farmers and investors in the Philippines

HELEN M FLORES
THE PHILIPPINE STAR, MANILA

Founded by a group of young Filipinos, social enterprise Cropital has developed a crowdfunding site that aims to provide technical and financial support to small-holder farmers in the Philippines.

Launched in November 2015, Cropital has provided financial support to around 560 farmers across the Philippines to date. The enterprise is globally recognised and is supported by various organisations in the Philippines and abroad, including the US, Netherlands, and Malaysia.

The enterprise helps farmers reduce the risks in farming and improve productivity by processing crop insurance, providing a buyer, and offering training and access to technology partners. At the same time, Cropital provides an alternative medium for investment with faster and higher returns. The amount of investment ranges from P5,000 to P50,000. To date, Cropital

has raised USD 120,000 worth of investment. The rates of return for investors range from three percent to 30 percent in less than six months. Cropital was awarded Philippine Social Enterprise of the Year at the Philippine Rice Bowl Startup Awards 2016.

<https://www.cropital.com/>

We are living a story of change

Around the world, there is a movement of ordinary people making a difference every day.

An illiterate Burkina farmer who managed to stop desertification thanks to a traditional farming technique. A German doctor who turned a disability into a talent, training blind women to detect breast cancer earlier than any gynecologist can. A 26 year-old Indonesian medical student who tackles poverty and waste by offering the poorest to trade trash for healthcare.

Solutions exist everywhere to create a world where sustainability and profits are compatible, inclusive democracy is restored, citizens from all over the world have access to education, healthcare and appropriate food, men and women have the same rights, and climate change is controlled.

If you believe that people don't need to wait on others to create positive change and that change can be achieved by anyone.

If you believe that building this world starts by changing the way we talk about it, restoring confidence and inspiring everyone.

Then join a growing movement of hope and change:

Sign this manifesto on sharestoriesofchange.org and commit yourself to spreading these stories of solutions, help them cross borders and have a greater impact.

Join the movement

IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews

Today, 50 of the biggest newspapers in the world will publish in 40 countries, 60 positive initiatives that respond to pressing global issues.

#StoryOfChange
#ImpactJournalism

Discover all these inspiring stories on impactjournalismday.com



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One of the most dependable players of the Bangladesh national cricket team is Tamim Iqbal. He is the first to make the record of scoring more than 10,000 runs in international cricket for Bangladesh. His role in taking the Bangladesh cricket team to the semi-finals in the ICC Champions Trophy is definitely undeniable. He has not only given continuous excellent performance himself, he has also been a great inspiration for the Bangladesh national cricket team.

The Brand Ambassador of **Crown Cement Tamim Iqbal** is a pride to us and to the nation.

CROWN CEMENT
FOR SOLID FOUNDATION

The Zohra Orchestra

Teaching young girls to play the music of their dreams in Afghanistan



Musicians of the Zohra Orchestra.

PHOTO: REDIS AZI

HASSAN KARIMI
HASHT E SUBH, KABUL

Following years of civil unrest, the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM) was opened in 2010 to offer kids of all social backgrounds an opportunity to learn music. Today, the Zohra Orchestra at the ANIM is the first all-female group of its kind to launch in Afghanistan.

In one of the many practice rooms of ANIM, Zarifa Adeeb is playing the violin with admirable dexterity and concentration amidst a group of students. While this young Afghan girl has long dreamt of becoming a pop singer, her passion for classical music has emerged much more recently.

When she was only one-year-old, Adeeb fled with her family to Pakistan where she stayed until she was 15, before deciding to return to her own country. "I came here at the end of 2014. When I was looking for a music teacher I found this music institute, where you can come and learn music in a professional way." Currently in her final year, Zarifa Adeeb has been studying the violin for two years. She's ambitious and hopeful. And yet, only ten years ago, these music lessons would have been completely banned.

ANIM was first opened in 2010 by Ahmad Naser Sarmast, the current director, although its history goes back even further. The institute is rekindling a musical teaching tradition that was severely weakened over the course of recent political upheavals. With the original creation of the music school in 1974, music became a part of the national curriculum in Afghanistan. The school held classes until 1988 when it closed due to the war, and it then stayed shut throughout the rule of the Taliban, since music was made illegal.

The school reopened its classrooms

when Hamid Karzai, the former president of Afghanistan, came to power. In 2008, Ahmad Naser Sarmast began a project called the 'Reconstruction of Afghan Music,' which was funded by the World Bank. Two years later, the music school became ANIM and began teaching courses in both classical western and eastern music. These include lessons in the violin, viola, guitar, piano, trumpet and flute, as well as more traditional instruments like the robab, ghickak, tambour drum, qashquarcha, the three-stringed sarod, and the delroba.

THE FIRST AFGHAN ORCHESTRA EXCLUSIVELY FOR GIRLS

Currently, ANIM has around 250 students, including 75 girls. From these ranks, these young women have pooled together their respective talents to form the Zohra Orchestra: the first Afghan orchestra made up exclusively of girls. Started in 2014, this musical group held its first event at the Canadian Embassy in Kabul—not exactly a small-town crowd. Zarifa Adeeb talks about these first days: "When I first joined the school there were only five girls in total. We wanted to organise a group for women since, that same year at the institute, the boys were allowed to create both rock and pop groups. It was like a competition. So we created a choir. As time went on, other girls came to join the group. That's when, only three weeks later, we changed from a singing group into an orchestra."

"The original idea for the Zohra Orchestra came from a young girl called Mina who was a student here. The idea was taken up by Dr Naser Sarmast and, today, we're witnessing the orchestra's success," explains Mohammad Murad Sharkhush, who teaches the qashquarcha, an ancient Afghan instrument, at the institute. Unfortunately, like many people the young girl experienced

some family problems. She had to go back to her home province, and then her family refused to let her return to Kabul.

Mohammad Murad Sharkhush explains that the musicians in the orchestra range from 12 to 21 years of age. Recently, the Zohra Orchestra has had the opportunity to participate in various international programmes, like the Davos Forum in Switzerland. "One of our main successes so far was being able to show to the world a positive image of Afghanistan and its culture. This orchestra has been supported by several countries and is also known as the Angels of Music," he adds.

A SYMBOL OF AFGHANISTAN'S FUTURE

Every year, between 300 and 400 applicants take the institute's entrance exam and only 50 of them are offered places. Around 50 percent of the candidates are homeless or orphaned children and are put forward by NGOs working on children's rights in Afghanistan. As well as the Zohra Orchestra, the institute has eleven other music groups.

Mohammad Murad Sharkhush continues, "When a change occurs in a country, it's better not to worry. You should be positive, and I am optimistic. Afghanistan is a country where art occupies a prominent place in people's lives."

At the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, both rich students and orphans attend music classes under the same roof. They express their emotions - whether that means pain, hope, joy or grief - through music, so that one day they will be able to fulfil their childhood dreams. As Ahmad Naser Sarmast says, "The Afghanistan National Institute of Music is like an island of hope in the dark. This institute is the symbol of the Afghanistan of tomorrow."

<http://www.anim-music.org/>

Not all waste is wasted

Greenport, a Swiss start-up, has developed the world's greenest toilets. The vegetation of Zoo Zurich thrives on the excrements collected from them.

MARTIN STURZENEGGER
TAGES-ANZEIGER, ZÜRICH

If the banana trees at Zoo Zurich are particularly lush, it's thanks to a fertiliser with an unusual ingredient: human waste. In the spring of 2016, zoo employees cleared a bamboo grove in Zurich's Masaoia Rainforest to plant the trees. "We were really surprised how fast the plants put down roots," says Martin Bauert, curator of the tropical area at Zoo Zurich.

The reason for this rapid growth has a Portuguese name - *terra preta* (black soil). It is a particularly fertile substrate made from compost, charcoal, and human faeces. "We wanted to break some taboos with our products," explains Tobias Müller, who, with three friends, founded Greenport in 2015, a company that supplies the soil to Zoo Zurich. It's a totally natural cycle, he says: faeces turn to soil and urine to fertiliser, which in turn provide the basis for producing food.

To obtain the requisite raw materials, the start-up team developed a mobile toilet: the Greenport. The excrement ends up in a pyrolysis facility and is processed into charcoal with a high CO₂ content. Contaminants are destroyed, valuable nutrients are preserved. The biochar is then supplemented with compost and soil organisms to obtain *terra preta*. The Greenport team got its inspiration from indigenous populations in the Amazon basin who centuries ago used to fertilise their fields with a similar mix of soil.

The urine is not wasted either. It ends up at the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, which has developed a process to turn it into plant fertilisers. Helping create what is presumably the world's most environment-friendly privy.

<https://www.greenport.ch/>

Apiary School

Empowering women through apiculture



Women in Djurdjura mountains of Algeria learning the methods and techniques related to beekeeping.

TASSADIT CHIBANI
EL WATAN, ALGIERS

An Apiary School project has been set up in the Djurdjura mountains of Algeria, inspired by the Association for the Promotion of Mountain Apiculture (APMA). Based in Aïn el Hammam, forty-five kilometres to the southeast of Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, the association has been organising regular beekeeping training courses since 2010, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the NGO ASMED (Association for Solidarity, Migration and Exchanges for Development). The training courses are aimed at enthusiasts for this line of work, especially women from rural areas. No less than eighteen women –

from Aïn el Hammam along with other areas in the Tizi Ouzouwilaya – have taken part in different training courses led by beekeeping professionals, including specialists from France. Support from the UNPD and ASMED has even led to hives being provided for women wanting to take up beekeeping. The ambitious project aims to promote apiculture in the mountains and at the same time guarantee high quality organic products. APMA has widened its scope of activity by offering other regular training courses in different areas of agriculture, a development that has now been integrated into its new name: the Association for the Promotion of Mountain Agriculture.

lerucherecoledudjurdjura.blogspot.fr/

The FoodCloud concept spreads its wings

CATHERINE CLEARY
THE IRISH TIMES, DUBLIN

A college project devised by two students to redistribute food for sale in retail outlets close to its sell-by date has become a remarkable success in Ireland, so much so the concept is catching on in Britain with the potential to be adopted throughout the world.

Aoibheann O'Brien still remembers the first box of food five years ago. She and co-founder Iseult Ward picked it up at a farmers' market and dropped it off to a youth services centre in Dublin.

The delivery was a dummy run for their college project FoodCloud. It became a tech start-up which connected businesses that had surplus food with charities that needed food. Five years on 8,300 tonnes of food, more than 18

million meals, have been diverted from landfills. FoodCloud employs 30 people tackling food waste from almost 2,000 businesses in Ireland and the UK.

Until late 2016, FoodCloud transactions involved small consignments of food collected by individual charities from the delivery bays of supermarkets and shops to serve the most disadvantaged people.

Their new headquarters, a large warehouse near Dublin, is a food redistribution hub and call centre. In the UK, more than 1,600 branches of Tesco and three Waitrose stores are now posting donations of food.

"There's a lot of energy and loads of people behind it," adds Aoibheann O'Brien. "People felt intuitively that this was a really good thing to do."

<https://food.cloud/>



Co-founders Iseult Ward and Aoibheann O'Brien.

COURTESY: FOODCLOUD

Driving on a wheelchair

JANA KLÍMOVÁ, MAGDALÉNA FAJTOVÁ
RESPEKT, PRAGUE

Many men have boyhood dreams of building their own car. The vast majority grow out of the idea. But Ladislav Brázdl and his two sons made sure their dreams came true: Elbee Mobility, their family business in the small town of Loštice in the Olomouc district of North Moravia, the Czech Republic, is now manufacturing its own cars. The Elbee vehicle opens from the front, and you don't climb in, but ride straight into it with a wheelchair.

The front-end opening of the car is an innovation that enables a new kind of independence for wheelchair users travelling by car.

Ordinary vehicles adapted for wheelchair users simply do not resolve the problem of what to do with the wheelchair. If wheelchair users don't have enough strength to stow their wheelchairs themselves, they need someone to help. A major

advantage of front-end opening is that wheelchair users can park the car face-on to the curb and can ride out of the car safely among pedestrians on the sidewalk, instead of onto the roadway.

The current price is CZK 600,000 (almost USD 25,000), and although the effective purchase price can be cut by two-thirds thanks to various subsidies and reliefs, it is still cheaper for wheelchair users to modify a normal car. Indeed many have already drawn on all the available subsidies to do this. Despite this, dozens of Elbee cars are now on the roads of Europe.

The Elbee automobile marks a major breakthrough in travel for the disabled. According to Ladislav Brázdl Jr, "We've had reactions from people saying that thanks to the Elbee they're now learning to drive and they are regaining strength and ability. In our small way, we're restoring their lives."

<http://www.elbeemobility.com/>



An elderly gentleman celebrating the purchase of his Elbee mobility vehicle.

COURTESY:
ELBEE MOBILITY

A nose for trouble

Giant mine-detecting rats are saving lives and protecting livelihoods in Africa and Southeast Asia

LAUREN CROTHERS
SPARKNEWS, PARIS

Siem Reap province, Cambodia — Merry doesn't sleep much at night. In spite of this, she's usually up before the sun, and then driven to work along with 11 of her colleagues. They work for a few hours in the early morning, napping and drinking water between shifts. Her job, detecting landmines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO), requires a laser-like focus. It also helps that at about a kilo in weight, she's very light of foot and does not set off the mines.

Merry is an African giant pouched rat, or *Cricetomys gambianus*, a docile and exceptionally smart rodent with superior olfactory abilities. She's one of a team of "HeroRATs" bred, trained and deployed by the Belgian non-profit APOPO, which is headquartered in Tanzania. After working successfully to help detect mines in Mozambique for more than a decade, and in Angola since 2013, the organisation partnered with the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) in 2015.

Cambodia is one of the most mine- and UXO-contaminated countries in the world. At least 500,000 tonnes of ordnance were dropped by the United States as the war spilled over from Vietnam, while decades of conflict from the 1970s onward saw millions of mines laid throughout the country. According to the 2016 Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, more than 1,600 sq kilometres of land are still contaminated by mines and other explosive remnants of war.

The impact on communities has been nothing short of devastating. According to the latest figures from the Cambodia Mines/UXO Victim Information System, more than 64,000 casualties were recorded between 1979 and February of this year. Of these, nearly 20,000 people were killed. Cambodia Mine Victims Information System (CMVIS) said there have been more than 9,000 amputations recorded; other sources put the figure at nearly three times that number.

Down a dirt path in Varin district's Srenoy commune, about 25 kilometres from the Thai border, lies the village of Dai

Ouv. It's home to more than 2,000 people and a 3,600-metre-long minefield that has blighted the tranquil landscape for decades. By April 8 of this year, Merry and her clawed comrades, along with their human counterparts, were expected to have cleared the entire area, having put paws on the ground on February 1.

Pok Nin, a resident of Dai Ouv, always had a heightened sense of fear when he

he said.

Once their little harnesses are on, the rats mean business. Tethered to a cable that extends across a 10x20-metre grid and attached to handlers on either side, they work the ground with their noses, inch by inch, back and forth. They do this swiftly: the rats are able to check an area the size of a tennis court in 30 minutes. When a rat smells TNT, the explosive compound

miss mines using rats." Mozambique was officially declared mine-free in September 2015, and the country's National Institute of Demining has asked APOPO to stay and complete residual tasks, such as an exploded bunker area in Maputo.

Specially trained HeroRATs have also proven successful at sniffing out tuberculosis in Tanzania and Mozambique. According to APOPO, the rats have identified more than 11,000 TB cases missed by government clinics, increasing detection rates by over 50 percent in 2016.

In addition to landmine detection in Cambodia, Mozambique and Angola, the rats will soon begin operations in Zimbabwe. The NGO has also just announced its expansion into Colombia, where, after acceptance by the government, it is hoped the rats can help tackle the problem of improvised explosives that do not contain much metal and are therefore harder to detect using traditional equipment.

Sister Denise Coghlan works in Cambodia as part of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines team that was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. "They're interesting-looking creatures," she said of the HeroRATs. "I think anybody that can contribute to mine clearance and eradication of the problem is an asset."

Coghlan and Shirima both noted that funding is one of the major challenges in mine clearance. The use of rats is cost-effective in the long-term, as their basic needs—water, food and a clay pot to bed down in—are inexpensive. (A special programme allows people to "adopt" a HeroRAT online and help defray the costs.) They are also able to cover more ground in a shorter amount of time than a person with a detector, speeding up operations and leaving funds for further tasks, or for checking a wider area for explosives.

Back home in their freshly cleaned clay pots and sated by a hearty meal of banana and peanuts, Merry and her colleagues settled in for the rest of the day. Come sunrise, they'd be back out in this quiet corner of Cambodia again, noses to the ground.

www.apopo.org



An Apopo rat hard at work.

PHOTO: JAMES PURSEY/APOPO

tried to grow crops; one man he knew was killed after stepping on a landmine, while another had a very close call when his tractor triggered one in a field.

Like others, he was skeptical about the rats' ability to clear mines. "Cambodian rats run everywhere and eat everything," Nin said. "I was doubtful."

But in February, he was handed a mine-free, 300x50-metre plot of land that the rats had cleared. "It has changed my life,"

found in most landmines, it will stop and focus on that one area before scratching lightly at the soil. Once the scent is confirmed, the teams begin a careful excavation to uncover what lies beneath.

"The impact has been big," said Vendeline Shirima, APOPO's international mine-detection rats supervisor from Tanzania. "People would say it was crazy, but when we started clearing Mozambique, they saw it was pretty amazing. We never

The Nawaya Project

The Lebanese talent programme taking on youth unemployment

MARC-ANTOINE PELAEZ
L'ORIENT-LE JOUR, BEIRUT

In 2009, young Lebanese-American Zeina Saab met Nadeen Ghosn in the isolated Lebanese village of Chmestar. The unabashed 14-year-old spontaneously presented Saab with a collection of her drawings; a series of elaborate fashion

sketches. Nadeen had never even learned the basics of fashion design. "When I met her, I knew that she could one day become the next great fashion designer. But without means or resources, her talent would probably never be cultivated," says 33-year-old Saab. After that Zeina had but one obsession: to help the disadvantaged youth pursue their pas-

sion. In 2012, she founded the Nawaya Project, an NGO that, through its "Talent Program", connects underprivileged youth with skilled mentors and professionals. With the help of financial investors, institutional partners and anonymous donors, Nadeen, the first beneficiary, enrolled in a Lebanese fashion school. Nawaya recently established

"Impact Lab", a new project that helps young unemployed Lebanese develop innovative solutions for the problems their communities face. The ultimate aim is for the projects to become profitable, so that these youths are able to take their lives into their own hands.

<http://www.nawaya.org>

Hanging out with the Sheroes

SIDHARTHA ROY

THE HINDU, CHENNAI

The dimly lit café was stirring to life on a Monday morning as the traffic flow on the sleepy Fatehabad Road outside gradually picked up pace.

Sheroes Hangout is tucked away between some nondescript *dhabas* (eateries), across from a five-star luxury hotel. In Agra, famous as the city of the Taj Mahal, the café is a well-known address. The décor of the restaurant is tastefully done and the walls are enlivened by colourful graffiti.

Sheroes is on the map for a unique reason: it is run by women who have survived acid attacks.

At the start of the day, Bhupendra Singh (29), the café's operations manager, looks slightly annoyed as he gets the furniture set in place. The mood transforms when lively Rupa (24) enters, swinging the glass door.

It is hard to believe that till a few years ago, Rupa avoided talking to people, hiding her face behind a *dupatta* (long scarf). She did that so she would not have to expose her face, which was mutilated by corrosive acid thrown on her when she was just fifteen, allegedly by her stepmother and some other men, while she was asleep.

"I don't care anymore about what people think or when they stare at me. It is those who attacked me who should hide their faces. Why should I?" she asks.

Sheroes, which first opened in Agra in 2014, now has branches in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) and Udaipur (Rajasthan). The café was born out of the Stop Acid Attacks campaign, which was launched in 2013.

Alok Dixit, founder of the campaign, explains its genesis. "We started an online



Neetu, Geeta, Ritu and Anshu of Sheroes Hangout, Agra.

COURTESY: SHEROES HANGOUT

campaign to bring together survivors of acid attacks, and more and more of them joined us. Most survivors are in the age group of 16 to 28 and are dependent on their families." Sheroes was opened after everyone wanted a self-sustaining system for the survivors, he said.

Unlike Rupa, though, 30-year-old Rukkaiya continues to cover her face when she is not at home or working at the Sheroes Hangout. "I felt more confident after I joined Sheroes and met other survivors. They are like my family and even the guests treat us like normal people," she said.

Rukkaiya was just 14 when her sister's kin threw acid on her face, because she rejected a proposal for marriage.

India's federal Home Affairs Ministry said in Parliament on April 11, 2017 that 147 women suffered acid attacks in 2015. This is widely seen as an underestimate, since many attacks go unreported.

In 2016, a national law was passed under which an acid attack is recognised as a

cause of disability, and victims have a right to financial support. Three years before that, specific legal provisions were added to the Indian crime code making an acid attack punishable with a minimum of ten years in jail.

India's Supreme Court had also stepped in earlier, in 2015, and ordered curbs on over-the-counter sale of acid. The court asked the government to ensure that buyers are at least 18 years old, and provide a government photo ID to make a purchase. Yet, clandestine sale of acid continues and in reality it remains easily available and cheap, Stop Acid Attack campaigners say. It is also difficult for survivors to access the minimum support fund of 300,000 Indian rupees that they are entitled to.

While these steps by the government can give some hope to survivors, the number of victims is not yet showing signs of a decline according to campaigners. Initiatives such as Sheroes and the supportive people who visit have a vital role to play.

One of the regular patrons at the café is Tanya Sharma (21), a civil service aspirant. "A friend first told me about the café and now I come here often. The food is really good and the hospitality is even better," she says.

The manager of the café says it gets many regular guests who live in Agra, but most of its patrons are foreign tourists. Sheroes offers North Indian and Continental cuisines but the menu card mentions no prices. The guests can pay whatever they like.

"We make a profit almost throughout the year but some months can be lean and we try crowdfunding then to keep the café running," he said.

As lunch time approaches, a small bus arrives. A group of curious foreign tourists clamber down to have a meal. Anurag Shekhawat (27), a tour manager with Canada-based 'g adventures' ushers them in.

They are received by Madhu Kashyap (37), a survivor. She switches on a documentary on the café's large screen television before taking food orders. The documentary tells the guests the story of Sheroes. As the video ends, Suzanne, a Canadian visitor, wipes tears away.

"I can't even imagine the horrible experience these women have gone through but it is empowering to see their strength," she says.

Madhu had at one point contemplated suicide, before someone suggested Sheroes Hangout.

"I got to know about it from the doctor who was treating me. Ever since I joined, my life has changed," she said.

<https://www.facebook.com/SheroesHangout/>

Providing safe drinking water solutions at scale

ERONIE KAMUKAMA

DAILY MONITOR, KAMPALA

When non-profit Impact Carbon was first introduced in Uganda, it sought ways of advancing the production and quality of improved, clean-burning cookstoves as a way to mitigate carbon emissions and reduce indoor air pollution. As operations at Impact Carbon progressed, there was a realisation of the need to introduce water purification systems as another means to reduce the consumption of wood-based fuel, which was being used in large quantities to boil water. Impact Carbon decided that the idea would work best as a business project, and should focus on schools. Buying the systems would encourage schools to own the responsibility of carefully utilising and maintaining them. The idea birthed Impact Water, a social business which was registered in 2015.

Mark Turgesen, Director of Impact

Water in Uganda says, "The response is, 'when can I get started'? It is because schools are looking for solutions because they know it is a problem," he notes.

Indeed, Adam Kakembo, a teacher and sanitary master at Kawempe Muslim Secondary School in Kampala, says the school now has three Impact Water systems and consumes about 4,500 litres of water a day. He explains that before the introduction of these systems, the staff "would boil 300 litres for the boys and about 200 litres of water for the girls in the students' kitchens. We would consume about three to four lorries of firewood per week."

Impact Water put in place a credit facility that allows schools to pay over a two- and five-year long-term period, each child paying an average of Shs 800 per term.

Since the company's inception, 650,000 students in 1,300 schools have



Students queue up to get safe drinking water from the Impact Water Ultraviolet purification system.

PHOTO: ERONIE KAMUKAMA

benefitted from access to safe drinking water thanks to its systems.

Impact Water is looking to expand further in institutions such as health facilities by specifically targeting bulk

sales with non-governmental organisations and via partnerships with school associations.

<http://www.impactwater.co/>

KUTUMBITA

An app changing the face of the apparels industry in Bangladesh

SHAER REAZ
THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA

On April 24, 2013, the eight-storey Rana Plaza building, just outside Dhaka, collapsed – trapping nearly 3,000 people inside. The building, a factory for world famous fashion retailers along the likes of Zara and Benetton, was clearly developing cracks in the days leading up to the worst industrial disaster in Bangladesh, but the factory owners and managers still forced their employees inside the building. The collapse took the lives of more than 1,100 people and injured at least 2,000 others.

The aftermath of the Rana Plaza disaster was a litmus test for the developing nation. In the world's spotlight, Bangladesh would either have to grow above and beyond the common practice of treating labour as expendable in the path of progress, or big international business would be shamed by the world media into outsourcing production elsewhere. This was the reality of the apparels industry in Bangladesh four years ago.

Things have changed to some extent. While there are issues surrounding the remunerations to the workers who survived and the families of those who perished, as a whole, the attitude towards conducting business has changed on both sides of the retailer-contractor equation. Largely thanks to the role of labour rights organisations, NGOs, international watchdogs and some state-level intervention, the workplace is becoming safer for garments workers, risks on the factory floor are minimised, and factory safety policies are being implemented.

There's a fair share of private attempts at tackling the issues that Bangladesh's nascent industries are facing. Kutumbita is a tech startup headquartered in Singapore that focuses on empowering workers in the garments industry through an application designed to foster communication between employer and employee in firms which are too large for traditional communication channels. Kutumbita's product is an Android app, a channel which workers can use to voice their complaints and concerns to their employers, while a check-and-balance system ensures the employers act on the issues raised by their employees. This helps the management create the means for clear and equitable communication despite the size of the workforce and address the major issues in the garments sector in Bangladesh – from labour unrest to work-related grievances. While reporting a problem, such as the common occur-

rence of a blocked fire exit, the workers can attach images to better identify the problem and provide photographic evidence. Kutumbita is working on allowing users to upload video and audio along with complaint reports in an upcoming version. In short, Kutumbita tackles the challenge of logging grievances from a large non-desk worker population.

Kutumbita's app is more than a tool for communication. It can be used to send out emergency alerts from the management, inform workers of their rights, answer queries regarding safety laws, help workers access details about their

results for SQ Group, which has signed nearly 13,000 employees as the very first client of Kutumbita. This award-winning RMG manufacturer has already dispatched 3,000 handsets (which come as an optional bundle package) in collaboration with Kutumbita to its employees so that they can start using the app.

SQ is currently pushing notifications to workers via the app, scheduling training, accepting leave applications, registering complaints, and conducting surveys through the one-stop solution that is Kutumbita's app. Employees of SQ have received an optional bundle package from Kutumbita, consisting of a free entry level smartphone from WE and a SIM by Robi, the second largest telecom operator of Bangladesh. Each package comes with an 18-month installment plan, which ensures Kutumbita's package is not a financial burden on the workers if they choose to opt for it.

heard," he says. "With Kutumbita, we have a higher engagement rate with our employees, particularly the associates. Our operation costs have gone down significantly which is enhancing productivity," he adds.

Shahriar Rahman, Country Manager of Kutumbita, informs that Kutumbita is getting great response from buyers and manufacturers globally. "Kutumbita's mission is to convert the non-desk workforce to first-time technology adopter and make sure they are heard. And with our app, manufacturers are ensuring Higgs compliance and licensing cost of the app is much less compared to the benefit that you would be getting."

At present, there are over 4,000 garments manufacturing units in the country. According to estimates by labour rights groups, over half of these factories are at risk and the lack of fire safety, lack of policies for evacuation in case of emergency and lack of training all combine to make



A factory worker with the Kutumbita app.

COURTESY: KUTUMBITA

benefits, check schedules, work hours as well as time off and more. In doing so, the access barrier between the different levels of the organisation is thus removed, promoting transparent resolution of issues and mitigating labour unrest. At the same time, the workplace is made safer, workers' personal and professional lives are improved, global standards are met and firms have the scope of banking on the higher standards of their factories to gain an advantage when competing for contracts.

Putting the well-being of the workers at the forefront and establishing effective channels of communication have yielded

Because of Kutumbita's role in digitally empowering the workers of SQ, the apparels manufacturer now has a higher rating for their factories than before, yielding more revenue in the long run while giving their workers access to a platform which is designed to boost productivity and job satisfaction.

According to Warisul Abid, Director, People & Value Creation of SQ Group, this particular initiative reflects SQ Group's commitment towards excellence in compliance and employee satisfaction. "Being one of the world's most forward-moving RMG manufacturers, we wanted to take the next step to make sure our employees are being

the workplace extremely hazardous for the average worker in the apparels industry. There is a lot of work left to be done in fixing the problems, but Kutumbita's app presents a significant step forward in the right direction.

The role that Kutumbita plays in enriching the lives of garments workers in Bangladesh is invaluable. It's certainly trying to ensure that the future of Bangladesh is banked on an industry that no longer exploits its workers, rather gives them the necessary tools to change their lives for the better.

<https://kutumbita.com/>