DESIGN
EDUCATION
FOR
YOURSELF

project
DEFY

Unlearn.
Choose.
Learn.
Grow.

Project DEFY, is a holistic education organisation based in Bengaluru, India. We set up learning spaces, called 'Nook's within marginalized communities, to transfer the choice of learning back to the hands of learners.

Here, we don't think that any human being, young or old, is an "empty vessel" . Neither do we agree that any child needs to "trained" or "raised" to become an efficient adult.
So we aim for a hands on learning which is playful, explorable and most importantly, self designed.

For if the education is to benefit the learners,
the choice of learning belongs to them.

Letters from a Defiant to another

"The Nook is a place where I can feel comfortable. What surprised me the most is how easy it is to make new friends who care for each other and support each other. I have not experienced something like this anywhere else."

" That's why I keep on coming to the Nook. I have finally found a place which allows me to explore the options of what I want to do in life rather than being told what all I can't do,"

"After coping with my challenges I came back in the nook and I started to learn different skills
For me nook is a place for those who want to try so many things in life and who never give up on their purpose of their life"

"You are giving us an opportunity to learn together. Last week we did something separately and this week we will do something together, so we can learn a lot"

together
we learn.

together
we grow.

Our Story
so far..

Our journey started 7 years ago, in a village of kaggalipura in the outskirts of Bangalore...

 .....

institutions such as schools and colleges still propagate, has caused much harm and despair for young people all around the world. Instead of enabling children and youth to discover and develop their own interests, talents, dreams and aspirations, mainstream education assumes that its students need to be fed with a standardised, abstract, pre-given set of knowledge. This knowledge, it is assumed, will make students into productive, obedient, and thus efficient workers and labourers, who keep the economy going and find their pre-destined place and role in society.

How far do we dare to dream ?

How we see schools and universities is changing rapidly, and so is their significance. Clearly, this isn't about the future one or two organisations but disruption of the entire mindset of educating.

So the work we do, and the nooks that we set up are going to multiply in the near future.
In the next 5 years we aim to set up nooks within a hundred different communities. Diverting the stream of education into a more accessible and holistic process.

We even aim to see a future where nooks aren't just ours to set up. Communities start setting them up as safe spaces, to explore and learn within themselves, building sustainable solutions and working as one whole organism.

in terms of partnership

When we're set to shift entire thinking processes , it will always take more than one hand create a significant impact.
And there are ample organisations already working out, in India and abroad, decolonising the concept of education and bringing back the choice of learning to learners. The best part is although principally aligned, all of them are working within different boundaries, geographies and processes.
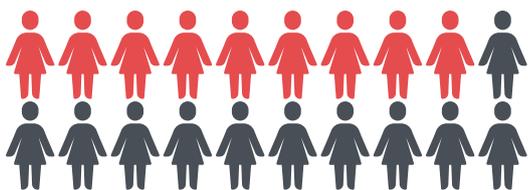
We aim to partner up with all such potential organisations, who are driving change towards a more compatible , conscious and humane future.
Multiversities and ecoversities is already doing a wonderful job in bringing together all such possible organisations and we keep looking forward to get together and row this boat of learning revolution ahead.

Impact

Total number of learners in 2021-22

338

45%

Average percentage of female learners in 2021 across all Nooks

114

Number of learning goals pursued across all Nooks in 2021

goal achievement rate (percentage of all goals across all Nooks that have been completed/achieved in 2021)

58%

Where
do we exist ?

We exist across the Indian subcontinent in different states from Karnataka to Meghalaya. Belowi s a map of the places we set up nooks, in this country
.

Jaipur, Rajasthan

Sohrarim, Meghalaya

Nongwah Meghalaya

Bangalore, Whitefield

Bangalore, J P Nagar

Chennai

Existing Nooks

Upcoming Nooks

Although an organisation based in India, we have been successful in setting up nooks in other countries as well, where there was enough space and need for accessible alternate learning process.

These include various African countries like Rwanda, Zimbabwe, etc and also our neighbours like Bangladesh

Barishal
Bangladesh
Barishal
Bangladesh

Gahanga
Rwanda

Bulawayo
Zimbabwe
Matibi
Zimbabwe

our
Stories
from
Indian Nooks

Indian Nooks

The past year has seen the Nooks go through virtual programs as well as their reopening.

While FLITE achieved our objective of ensuring that families were able to cope through the mental stress of the pandemic and bond together with each other, we reopened the Nooks with safety precautions in the later part of the year. The nooks brought back the learners from the confines of their homes and invigorated to build new projects, meet their fellow learners and have fun.

India saw new Nooks open in Sohrarim and Nongwah in Meghalaya along with Jaipur. These nooks add to the expansion that India Nooks have been doing.

While the Nooks impacted 240 direct learners 112 projects were completed at the Nooks. Skills were learned across electronics, mechanics, dance forms, music, jewelry design, electric motors, open source software, furniture design.

Said Irfan
J P Nagar nook

I want to become the best dancer in India"
Said Irfan, a 14 years old learner from JP
Nagar Nook. He lives near the nook with his
family of six members. His father is a stone
worker. This region Avalahalli is famous for
the stone workers and his mother is a
homemaker.

It's been six month since Irfan and his brother Imran became part of the nook.
During various celebrations in nook Irfan used to dance his favorite bollywood
numbers and make everyone amazed. Also, with his perfect blend of
mischievousness and innocence Irfan became an integral part of the nook
family pretty soon.

For the first cycle, he decided to do a project based on dancing. After some
brainstorming sessions, he came up with a project in which he will learn six
dance performances in the next three month cycle. Out of that six, four
performances he will learn from youtube and two of them he will do the
choreography and he successfully achieved that goal.

Now, He wanted to hustle around with the different skill sets while investing
his time to dance. In order to implement that he is planning to pursue two
projects in the upcoming cycle. One is dancing for sure. The other one to
unveil, both him and us, is eagerly waiting. Maybe the exploration days will
give us an answer

.

Balaji
Whitefield nook

"My name is Balaji and I belong to a middle-class family of Whitefield. I have a huge interest in computers, electronics, mechanical and want to pursue computer engineering in the future.
So much so that I was called a computer professor in school.

Some of my other hobbies are playing cricket, cooking, watching movies and useful videos on YouTube.

At the age of 15, I was interested in making some projects. But there was no money.

Then I heard about the Nook in my locality.
I went there and met Kushal sir. He guided me and taught me new skills. I still remember my first project was a mini fan using plastic bottles. It gave me a sense of high! I felt that I can also create something new. After that, my brother Venkatesh and I found an interesting project online called the automatic dustbin.
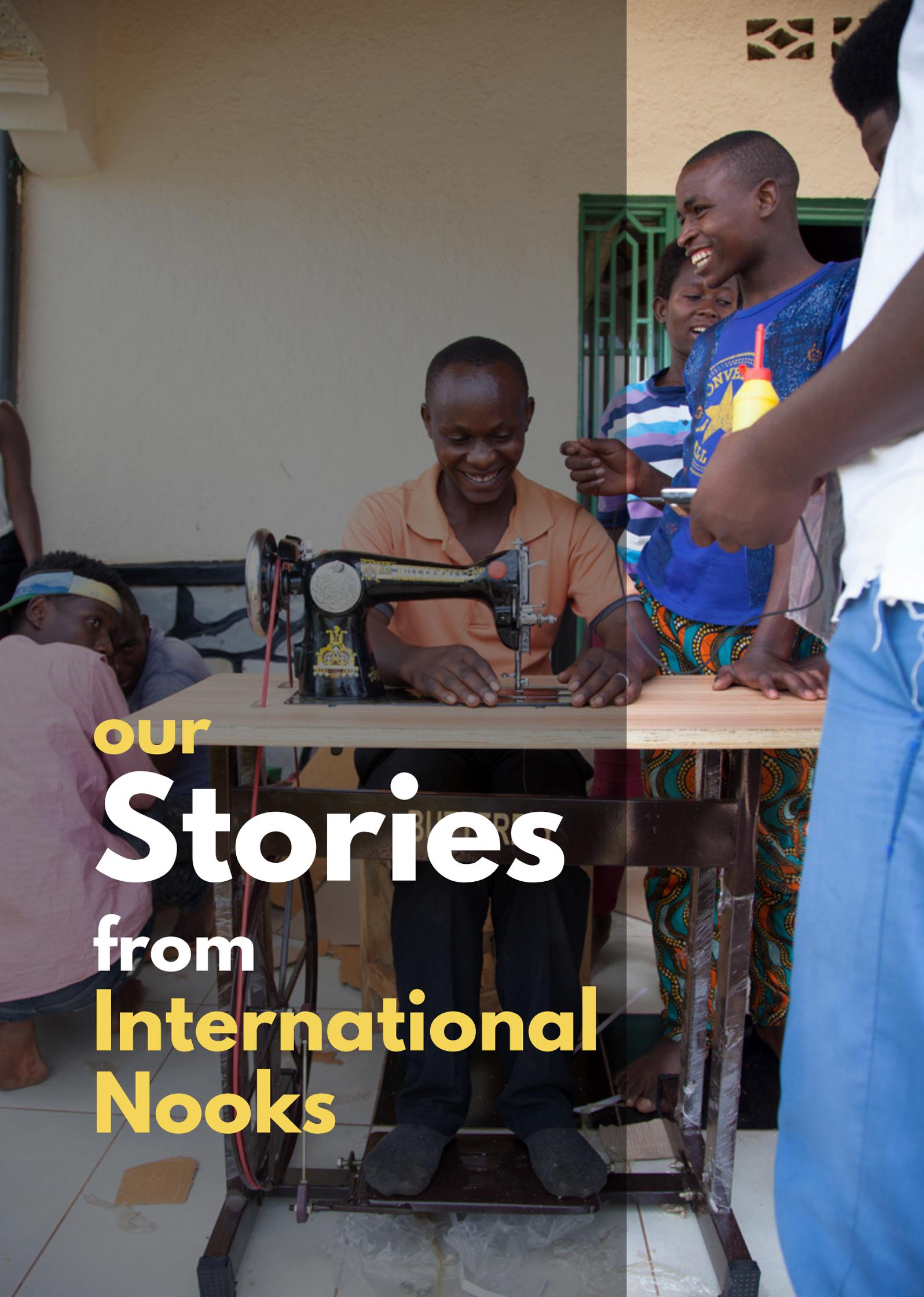We started building it.
There were some coding challenges, but we overcame those to make our version- Smart Bin.

After that my college started (which honestly, I found quite boring!) and I couldn't find time to go to the Nook. But one day my college took us for a Science Exhibition, and I took my Smart Bin along. To my surprise I won the first prize which consisted of Rs 10,000. I was ecstatic and gave it my mother. But at the same time, I felt the urge to go back to the Nook and did that before it was closed to the lockdown. During that time, I joined DEFY's FLITE calls and started a YouTube channel called Booyah Cooking. We reached 300 subscribers in just a month.

Now that the Nook has reopened, I am utterly thrilled! In the exploration sessions, I learnt HTML and my latest project was to make an automatic piano. I am looking forward to making may more things. This learning space has changed my life in ways more than one".

our
Stories
from
International
Nooks

International Nooks

Learners from Bulawayo showcased their projects to the community and made industry connections leading to mentoring and market opportunities.
Rwanda Nook broke barriers with women venturing into metalwork and getting internship opportunities.
Bangladesh Nook saw a number of new opportunities to interact with the Barisal community by sharing projects and showing that women are capable of changing the narrative by working on projects on safety and surveillance which is not usually championed by women in the community.
Matibi Nook evoked the curiosity of the community through the Edison Challenge by showing unconventional ways to use electricity to switch on a light bulb.

The impact could be seen through achieving different SDG's such as:

SDG 4 - Quality Education by introducing new learning opportunities and new skills which were otherwise not available to most from marginalised communities

SDG 5 - Gender Equality, with all our Nooks seeing an average 45% participation of female learners, we are breaking barriers and misconception about women in the communities
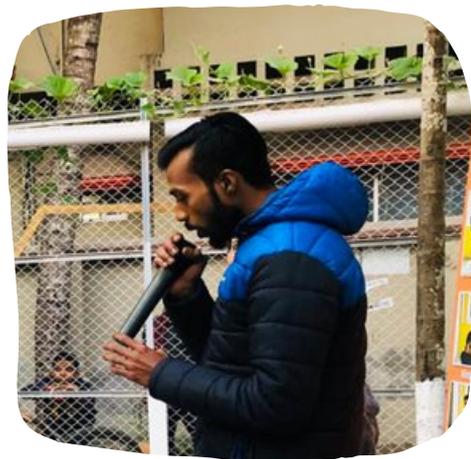
In 2022, we are looking to spread the Nook concept to new geographies and countries in Tanzania, Uganda, Bangladesh, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Let's look forward to some of our learner stories from these nooks across boundaries.

Arman Sheikh
Barishal Nook

Arman Sheikh is a 24-year-old living in Barisal city, in southern part of Bangladesh. He joined the Nook after completing his MA, when he couldn't find a job. The Nook helped him to rediscover his interest in electronics.

He took part in the Edison Challenge to produce electricity in an unconventional method and made a project that can light up an LED bulb. The project could produce electricity using wind and waves through a handheld operation. Post this, at a cultural event at the Nook, Arman helped the event planning team to set-up their lighting elements. This was showcased to the visitors as well who were very impressed by his work. Icing on the cake, he managed to find a job in lighting systems facilitated by the Nook.

Uwingabire Deborah
Rwanda Nook Hub

she dropped out of school when she was in primary 5 and then started selling sorghum drinks. Her life was not easy with her stepfather who used to torture her emotionally and mentally by telling her bad words. She likes watching movies to relax her mind and forget what she passes through at home.

One day, she came to meet a neighbor who was a learner at RNH and shared with her how self-learning happens in the Nook. she was interested but the issue was to convince her stepfather about this chance but finally, he agreed. she joined and what tracked her is the MOTTO written on the poster up on the gate says " ENTER IF YOU DARE TO DREAM".

She got interested in tailoring, formed a team of 3 people, took online courses, learned to take measurements, learned cutting, sticking a cloth, operating a sewing machine and now she is doing 5 shirt dresses for women.

She used to come with old clothes to practice on what she learned on youtube after some time her mother started to buy her African wraps so that she can sew the clothes for her siblings, and she was very proud of herself during the exhibition week where she presented her 5 shirt dresses for women to the community.

"The first experience was to live in the community, team working and sharing the ideas, emotions and the challenges which lead us to the problem solving.

The community motivated me and give me some ideas that can help me to work hard in the next cycle, I was very happy to present my work to my mother because she fought a lot with my stepmother so that I can be allowed to join the nook. The most and interesting feedback is that my mother promised me to buy me the tailoring machine that will help me when I am not in the nook " Deborah said

Uwineza Janviere
Rwanda Nook Hub

My name is Uwineza Janviere, I am a 16-year-old girl born in Kicukiro district, in Kigali Province, Rwanda. I am the youngest of fourteen siblings. I started going to school when I was seven, but that was not easy since it was expensive and I had to do many home chores before and after the classes
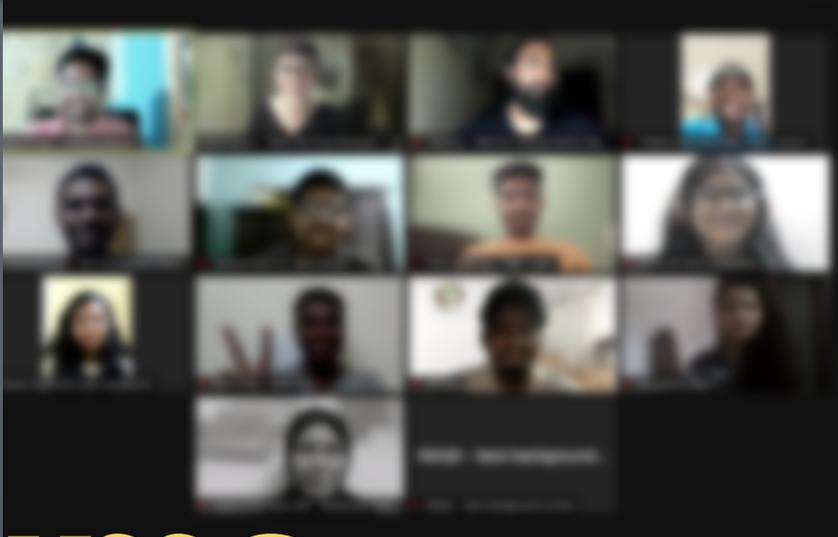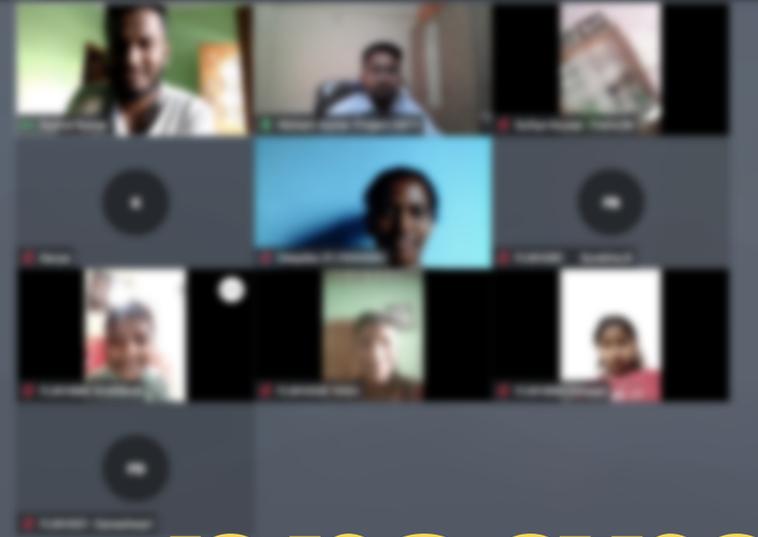
I found a job that required me to pack bricks: I had to carry them from where they were burned to where they were stored. After working there for three months, my mother made me stop going to work since she was sure I was going to die anytime from such a rough job. That was when joined my mother and siblings and went cultivating beans and maize so that we were able to earn some money to take care of our basic needs.

One of those days on my way to work, I suddenly heard that a technical school had opened in Gahanga. When I arrived at the Nook I was so grateful and surprised! I found out that it was not a school, as I had heard, but it was actually a self-learning center. I was told that we were going to teach ourselves and our only teachers were the laptop and internet!
But how? That sounded impossible to me. How can I teach myself?
That was when I started by first choosing what I wanted to learn and I chose how to learn how to apply face makeup and do a face massage.

Now I am learning what I want, and I believe it will be beneficial for me in the future. I thank the administration of Rwanda Nook Hub and everyone else who assisted in the opening of this learning space. That will help many of us who did not get an opportunity to study in a school or get a fulltime job. Also, the Nook will help even those who had dreams but never found ways to reach them.
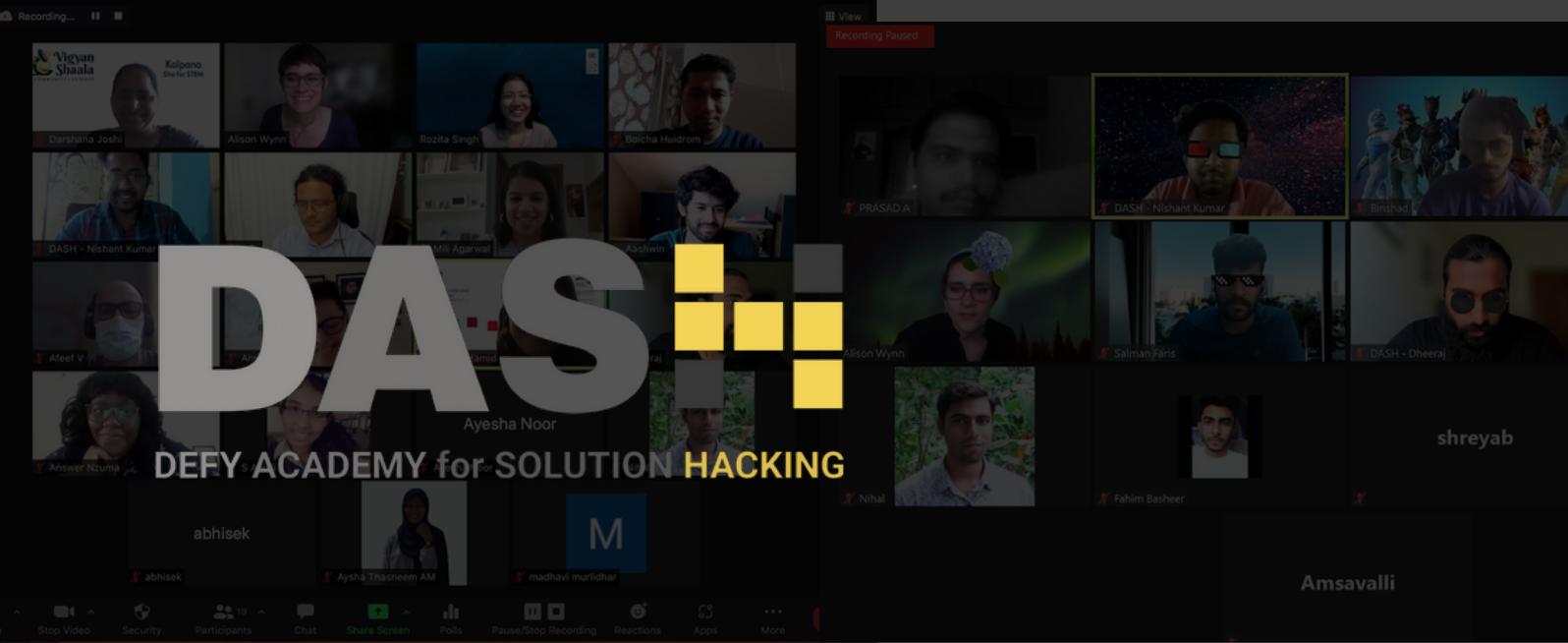
Now, all of us, Nook Learners, should take advantage of this great opportunity. Let's not let this change pass us by, because I am certain we can benefit a lot from it!
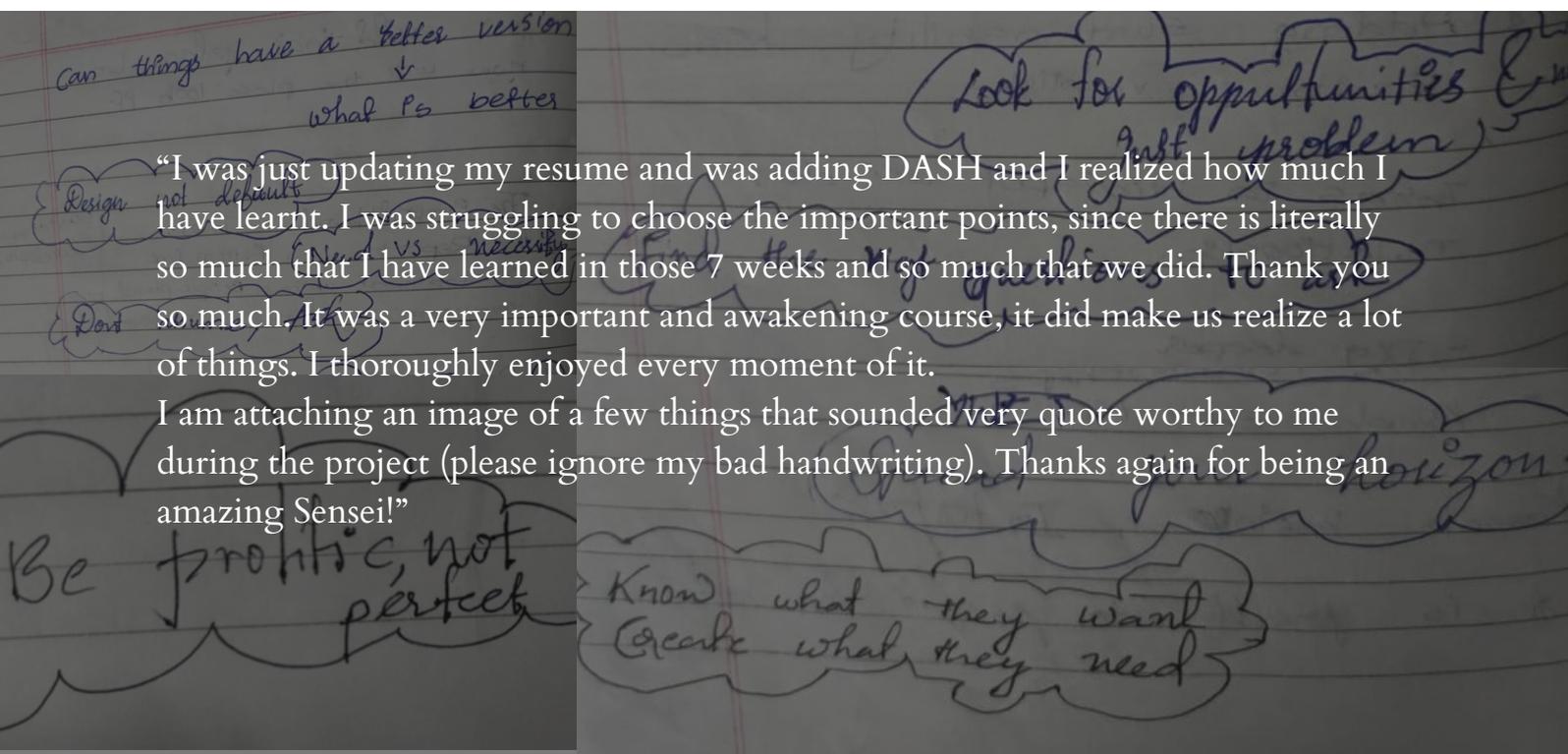
programs
started in
2021-22

Through our work with universities and colleges, the DEFY team realized that college students in India today have an indomitable thirst to explore, make, build, experiment and start-up, but they lack opportunities and frameworks to do so.

The DEFY Academy for Solution Hacking (DASH) was thus born, as an intense virtual learning program. The program trained students and young entrepreneurs to build problem-solving capacity.

In DASH, students worked to solve real-life problems with communities, rather than for them. Along with the guidance of seasoned mentors and experts, participants had the opportunity to engage in various workshops, speaker sessions, team activities and group discussions to make the entire learning experience vivid, hands-on and memorable.

"I was just updating my resume and was adding DASH and I realized how much I have learnt. I was struggling to choose the important points, since there is literally so much that I have learned in those 7 weeks and so much that we did. Thank you so much. It was a very important and awakening course, it did make us realize a lot of things. I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it.
I am attaching an image of a few things that sounded very quote worthy to me during the project (please ignore my bad handwriting). Thanks again for being an amazing Sensei!"

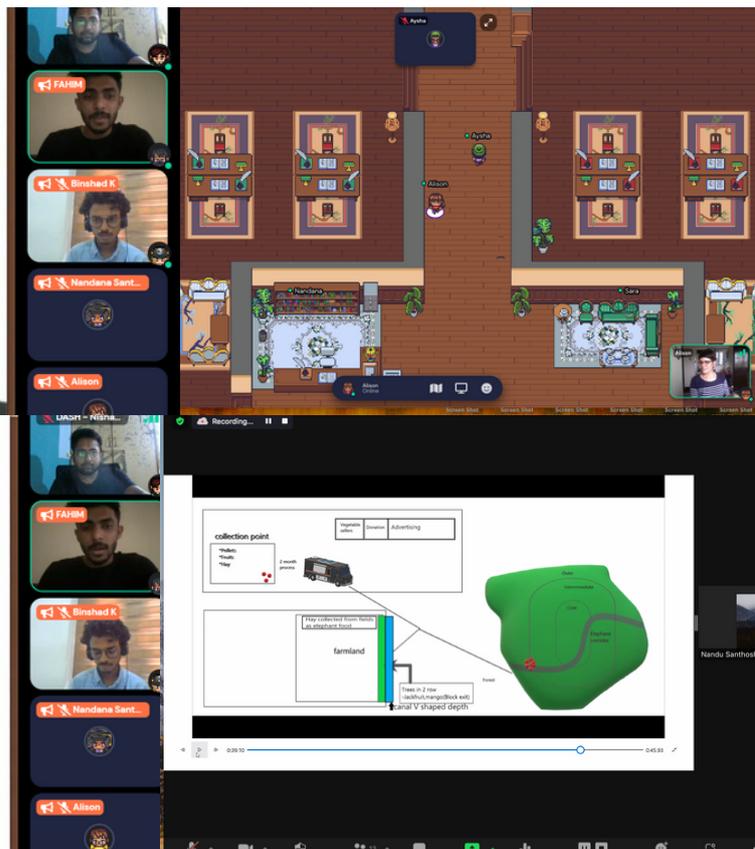| Team	Project
DS02	Digital Web Interface for Lawyers to help them digitise their work
DS03	An andoid app to help people recirculate / sell waste materials who need it
DS04	VR based solution to help senior citizens use technology effortlessly
DS05	Ecosystem to solve the challenge of human-elephant conflicts in area of elephants

communities
can be
self sufficient.

DISPECS

Disaster Prepared Community Spaces

DISPECS stands for Disaster Prepared Community Spaces and the program endeavours to imagine what a community response to a natural disaster would look like, if they were to have the benefit of time and preparedness. DISPECS aims to build a holistic intervention replete with the right resources, training materials, volunteering structures and a communication network that will help marginalized communities to build self-resilience in the face of a natural calamity.

It is a multi-thematic intervention and the team implemented a quick pilot intervention for its Animal Life and Ecology segment in the Southern State of Kerala which is prone to recurring natural disasters each year.

There are about 13 segments designed carefully to merge on with local partners and work on pilots. These include first aid, hygiene, alternate livelihoods, search and rescue etc..

Apart from this the team made real progress in terms of on boarding Domain Specialists in an Advisory capacity with the aim of completing program designs for the remaining segments.

Community Savings segment-
Kriti Gupta who is a Social Sector Professional and currently works with KPMG as a consultant and is the co-founder of Tales and Treasures, a social enterprise that aims to create unique rural experiences with the help of communities.

Awareness Information Segment-
Nitesh Bhardwaj, who is an Acumen Fellow and also the founder of 'Adiwasi Janjagruti' which is a grassroots non-profit that aims to leverage the power of audio and visual content to help people from marginalised communities.

First Aid segment-
Victor Oghenebrume, who is a community Pharmacist and a Public Health Enthusiast based in Nigeria. He is currently a member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria as well as a member of the Nigerian Red Cross, where he received training on BLS, First Aid and CPR and was certified as a First Aider.

Using Technology segment

Arun Kumar, who is a maker as well as a community enabler. He works at the crossroads of art, design, and technology. He seeks to share his knowledge by working on open- source software and open-source hardware for the benefit of society.
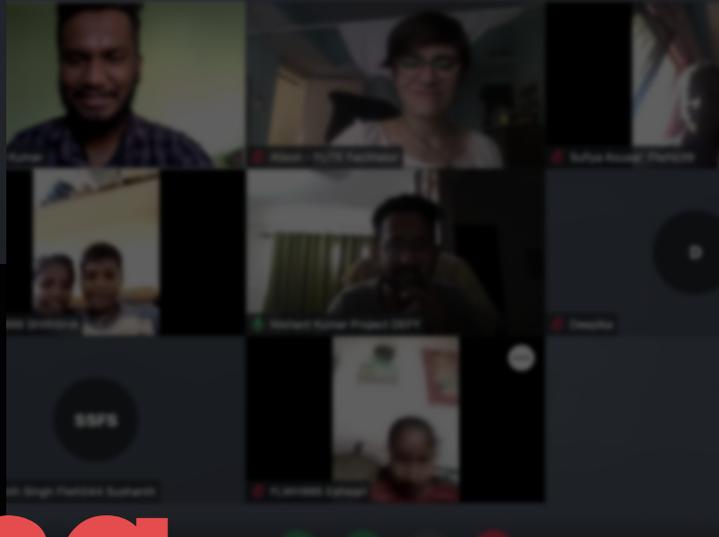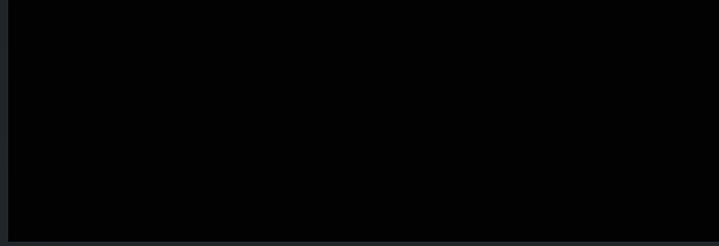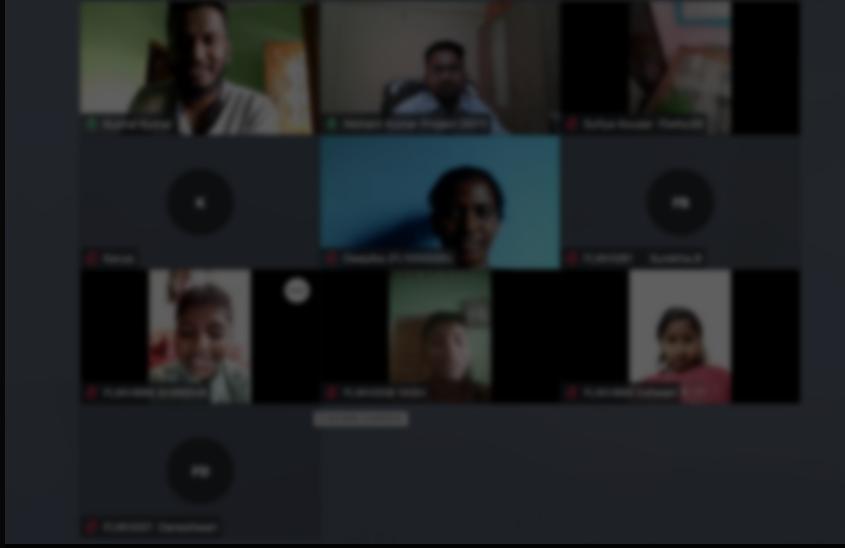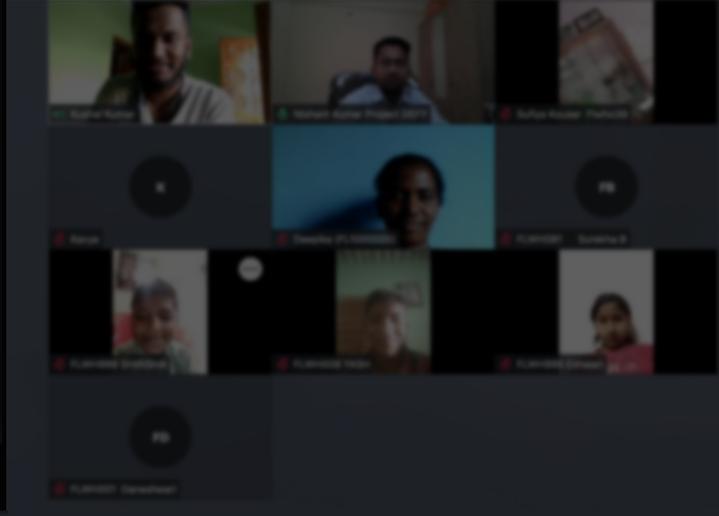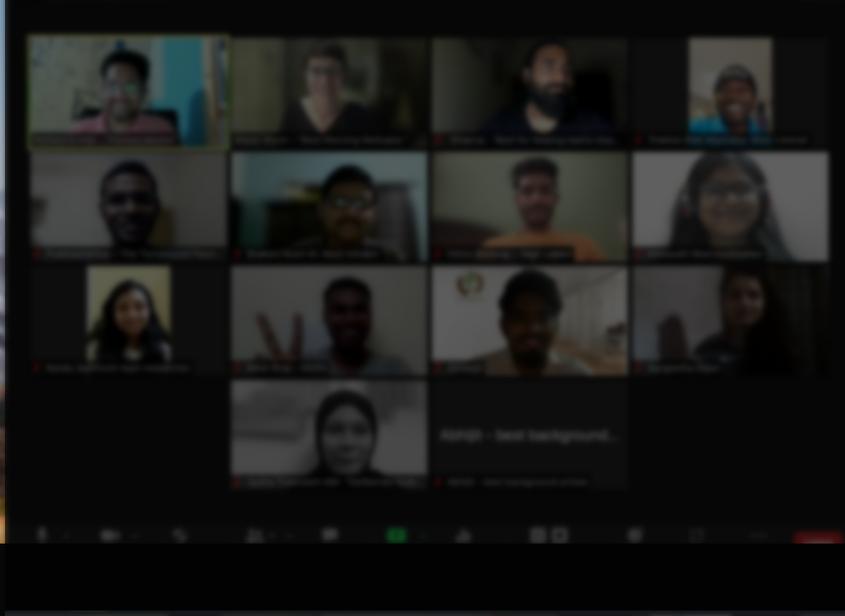
Construction segment

Monday David who is the co-founder of Upcycle Africa based in Uganda. The team also roped in an additional advisor in Michael Vivian Ekka who is an Architect and an Urban Designer and currently is completing his Masters at the Alto University in Finland.

Mental Health segment

Heart It Out which is a mental health multi-speciality organisation that aims to provide accessible mental health care across South Asia. Nithya Rao, the founder and Jyoti Das, R&D and Diagnostics Head at Heart It Out are actively supporting the team in designing the program.

Apart from this the team has also joined hands with 11 Volunteers from India and Africa who are helping the DISPECS team and the segment advisors. The next target for the DISPECS team is to complete the micro pilots for all the segments and then move towards stitching the different program designs and implement the first mega DISPECS pilot in one single community.

surviving
the pandemic

FLITE Families Learning Together

FLITE (Families Learning Together) is a program by Project DEFY to help the learners at the Nook continue their learning journey despite the closure due to the pandemic.

It started in 2020, during the first lockdown as a one to one model where one facilitator from our team used to lead a single family via telephone in their journey of finding their ikigai and developing their skills.

The program was designed and implemented to fulfill the community's need to develop resilience and continue learning through the pandemic.

Unfortunately, a phone-based program is not a replacement for the kind of real-time, in-person engagement that exists in spaces like Nooks.

However, FLITE proved to be the best alternative for learning in lockdown.

" I've never been to school. Before the FLITE programme, I could not get a chance to learn much. We were having weekly calls and tried to learn so many new things along with every member of the family. It also helps to understand each other better in the family " – Reshma

" During the lockdown, school was closed. At this time, FLITE was introduced to our family, it helps us to work on different projects along with the other family members. We had fun and learnt new skills " – Eshwari

" Through this programme, we have gained some new ideas and knowledge. My mother was interested in learning something new, but because we lacked learning materials and due to our busy schedule, she could not learn anything. After joining FLITE, we can learn what we want. " – Nisha

Musurath's story

Musurath is a young mother and learner at Kaggalipura Nook.

Learning at home was quite challenging for her because she didn't earn enough to buy materials for her tailoring projects. During the first few calls of the FLITE program, she decided to make miniature pants, shirts, kurtas, and other items-- to save cloth and still create a portfolio to show potential clients.

Now, Musurath has decided to start a line of baby and children's clothes made from upcycled fabric. She has researched the market as well. The constraints turned out to be an advantage for her, as they compelled her to find a creative solution for income-generation activities using tailoring, despite not having access to funds to buy cloth.

She says, "I'm so happy you're taking time to talk with us, I feel very happy to learn new things during the lockdown. Instead of pursuing my interests alone, it's good to work with a team and great to have feedback and discussions."

Nooks opened

Dhun, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Set up in mid February '22, the Dhun nook is a collaborative effort of Project DEFY and Dhun, Jaipur who have been working on the ecological shift of that region for quite a while

Sohrarim, Meghalaya

Sohrarim nook was the first nook set up in oneof the seven sisters of north eastern Indian states, Meghalaya., which also drew the Chief Minister's attention and kickstarted the whole project of setting up a series of nooks in Meghalaya.

Nongwah, Meghalaya

The second in line, after the Sohrarim nook, Nongwah nook is a powerhouse of creativity and energy, embracing colours and vividness at its peak.

Bulawayo, ZImbabwe

Set up during the pandemic,the Bulawayo nook remains one of the most enthusiastic spaces with learners up on their feet to present their ideas, projects and learn something new at any given opportunity .

Matibi, Zimbabwe

The Matibi nook's space is still ongoing devleopment but its is largest nooks in terms of physical space till now.. It is also the second Zimbabwean nook and a much needed one

Barishal, Bangladesh

This is the first nook in Bangladesh and also the first international one set up in an Asian country . Set up during the pandemic again in the busy neighbourhoods of Barishal, along the it definitely finds its space the strange combination of diversity, ecological and economic crises.
It has presented a vivd understanding of community and problem solving through its projects with a quite decent gender equity

Closing
notes

2021 continued to remain volatile and presented us with swinging states between different variants of the pandemic and the toll it brought along. While we pivoted heavily towards online learning we learned that our strength lies in person to person engagement and building communities in real life on the ground. With that as a pivotal learning we are going into 2022 with our first phase of scaling up! We have always believed that SDL through 'Nooks' will scale non linear and for the concept to take roots we will seed it within more and more communities and not confine it within one geography. This year we are building larger partnerships especially in India with expansion in North East and Northern India. Our expansion globally will strengthen this year with key partnerships across Africa. While we set up more Nooks across geographies we have ventured into creating a truly engaging portal for our learners which we hope becomes an open platform for anybody who is learning through SDL and other non conventional methods of learning. We are also pretty excited about DISPEC going into pilot mode and being able to learn about the effectiveness of our program design for preparing marginalised communities for disasters.
This year has been a hopeful start and we are looking forward to healing together with the world, we are also hoping and praying that the world will see peace and that we will find more compassion.

Megha Bhagat

join
us.