

EcoAd – Case Study



Key Message:

- EcoAd meaning “Eco-friendly Ads” to promote local businesses and micro-enterprises was established in hopes of reducing the use of plastic carry bags to a very low rate. They have managed to replace over 20 lakh plastic bags overtime.
- EcoAd has helped over 220 women in the self-help groups from rural areas which gives them a sense of dignity. They continue to help generate employment for more rural women.
- They manufacture and sell about 80,000 to one lakh paper bags every month to their clients.

EcoAd, established in 2011, is a social enterprise, based in Pune that supplies recycled newspaper paper bags as an alternative for plastic carry bags. They hire women belonging to self-help groups from the villages surrounding Pune city. EcoAd works to reduce the usage of plastic carry bags in urban areas of India and provide sustainable livelihoods to women.



Background

Overview of the Area

Pune district is located in the state of Maharashtra. It is bounded on the North and East by the Ahmednagar district and on the South by Satara District. Pune district covers 14 talukas and 13 Panchayat Samitis. The district covers about 15,642 km² of area and Pune city covers about 450.6 km². The city has moderate air and good water quality but is increasingly being burdened by large quantities of waste that is generated every day, the effects of which could be extended to its air and water through burning and dumping of different wastes. The average air quality of Pune is estimated to be 161.88 with the prominent pollutants being PM 2.5, PM 10, O₃, NO_x and SO_x which is considered moderate air quality (CPCB, 2016)¹. Major water sources in Pune are various dams that are surrounding the city. Samples from the city's water sources have revealed that the Water Quality Index lies between the ranges of 38.25 to 82.19 (MPCB, 2016)². Most of the sample values lie above 70 which means that the water lies in the non-polluted range.

Pune is the seventh largest metro area in the country having a population of 3.11 million. The city has a population density of 5,600 people per km². Pune has been one of the fastest growing cities in the Asian-Pacific and this has been true for some time. The decadal growth rate of Pune up until 2016 was estimated to be four percent and after that till 2026 would be around 3.04 percent. At this rate the estimated population of the city in 2031 is estimated to grow to 5.6 million (Pune Municipal Corporation, 2011) which makes waste a potential challenge for management.

Condition of the waste:

In Pune city, primary sources of solid waste are local households, commercial establishments and markets. The total quantity of waste generated per day is about 1,600 to 1,700 metric tons with an approximate per capita waste generation of 500 grams per day. Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) is responsible for collection, storage, segregation, transportation and disposal of all solid waste generated in the city. According to the PMC, Pune city generates dry and wet waste approximately in equal proportions. Solid waste segregation system for dry and wet waste in the city was started in 2005. According to PMC, from June 2010, the waste generated is being collected, transported and disposed at landfill sites which is about 20 km away from Pune at Uruli Devachi. They also have claimed to stop open dumping and processing the total waste generated scientifically. From the total waste generated about 500 metric tonnes dry waste is separated and removed by various agencies like rag pickers, scrap material vendors and other NGOs. These rag pickers segregate waste at various sources like from individual households, municipal containers and at the dumping site. There are more than 5,000 registered rag pickers involved in the waste segregation process. The PMC has dispersed over 563 containers and 116 compactor buckets around Pune. Estimates made by the PMC suggest that about 70 percent of the plastic products are converted into waste. The PMC has taken measures to make Pune a plastic waste free i.e. no plastic reaches the landfill. They set up about 200 material recovery centres to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover 170 to 180 metric tonnes of plastic waste the city generates per day (PMC, 2016).

¹ Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), NAQI status of Indian cities, 2016

² MPCB: Maharashtra Pollution Control Board

Need

Plastic products have become an integral part of our daily life, making its production increase every year. The very properties that have made plastic such a necessity for modern living pose problems once its useful life is over. Plastic is considered a highly useful material and its applications are expected to increase as more products and materials continue to be manufactured to meet consumption demands. The increased use and production is a particular concern in the country as the level of sophistication of the waste management infrastructure is not developing at an appropriate rate to deal with the increasing levels of plastic waste. It is very common to see plastic lying everywhere, clogging the drains, being accidentally consumed by animals, causing pollution due to incineration, etc. These issues if not addressed would only lead to more pollution that would worsen the condition in which plastic waste is being handled.

According to EcoAd, recycled paper bags would prove to be a feasible alternative for polyethylene bags. Manufacturing of fresh paper is a chemically expensive process, causing pollution and deforestation. Newspapers are made of recycled paper. Once they become outdated, they are of no use to the people and they choose to sell it to the kabadiwalas who keep the paper in the recycling chain loop. To put these newspapers to better use, it would be a feasible option to make carry bags out of them before they can be recycled. Manufacturing of fresh paper is a chemically expensive process creating pollution and causes deforestation. By using newspaper to create bags it is putting economic value to an otherwise useless piece of paper. Newspaper bags are preferred as they are cheaper than cloth bags which are not affordable for majority of the population. The process of manufacturing the recycled papers is eco-friendly. EcoAd hires women from self-help groups in the villages surrounding Pune city.



Women from Self Help Groups

Women self-help groups in the Pune district consisted of women that work from their homes, earning for the family. These illiterate women belonged to the villages in the Pune district. Some of them lie below the poverty line and it was noticed that with certain training they would prove to be useful in the manufacturing of recycled paper bags and other products. It would also be helpful for them as they would be able to put their earnings to better use such as household expenses, school fees for their children, to build assets etc.

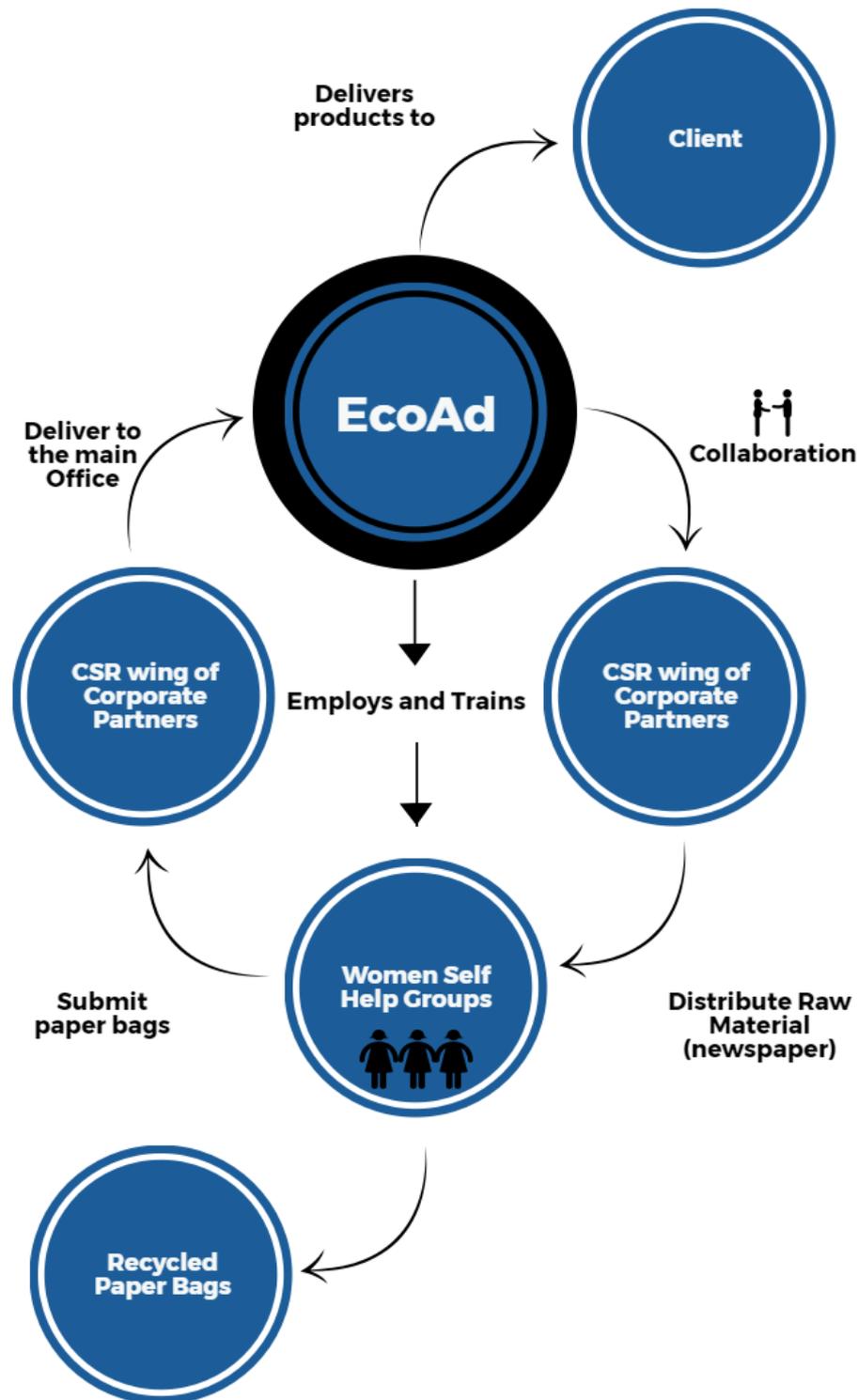
Response

EcoAd was established in hopes of reducing the use of plastic carry bags to a very low rate. EcoAd means “Eco-friendly Ads” which is one of the main motives of this social enterprise, to help local businesses and micro-enterprises receive recognition. However, recently they are focusing on increasing the sale of their paper bags and have introduced bags without any advertising space. The paper bags are capable of carrying weight load of about two kilograms to six kilograms depending on the size of these bags with an affordable price range of Rs. 3 to 6. The bags are durable and one bag can be used for up to 30 cycles of use. Besides protecting the environment from plastic waste and promoting local businesses, they aim to provide sustainable livelihoods for rural women in the area. They hire women from self-help groups and train them at their workshops that they carry out regularly. Involving small scale industries promotes the growth of the rural sector. Training hard-working women from the villages surrounding Pune city and providing them with the skills to manufacture high quality products is their way to ensure that goodwill spreads through all sections of society. These women earn an income of Rs. 2000-3000 per month by working with EcoAd. They work towards making cities of India free from plastic carry bags. EcoAd envisions a future of India greener than today, they want to create a greener tomorrow. They believe that it is possible to reverse the effect that improper management of plastic waste has caused.

Process

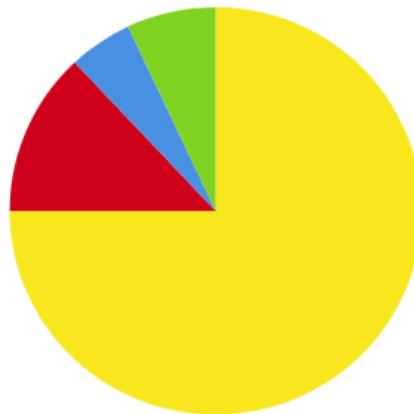
EcoAd was started as a student initiative by a group of Vishwakarma Institute of Technology (VIT) students in 2009, a small business that would be built gradually to a larger scale. They had started manufacturing and selling upcycled paper bags from their hostel dorms, which helped them in attracting clients. In 2011, EcoAd received the Unltd India Grant (Unlimited India Grant) that was used as seed investment to boost this start up. They thought that paper bag manufacturing would be a good source of income for women in rural areas and approached the women self-help groups in the villages surrounding Pune city through their NGO partners. They held workshops to train these women for the manufacturing of the paper bags. EcoAd employed about 20-30 women at the time of establishment of the social enterprise. They gradually hired more women from the surrounding rural areas and trained them in the skill of making newspaper bags. Their team consists of eight full time employees and about 3-4 part time consultants.

They have collaborated with corporate companies, whose Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wings help them with the purchase and transport of raw material to the women they have employed. The CSR wing purchases the raw material and distributes it to the women who then make the paper bags at their homes. Once these women have used the raw material to make the paper bags, they hand over the products to the CSR wings. All the packaging, quality checks and storage of the products happens in their office. EcoAd avails delivery to their clients for all products. They outsource the delivery for bulk orders, whereas small orders are managed by in-house staff. The packaging of their products does not consist of plastic in any form, thereby complying by their motive of reducing the use of plastic. They are currently operational in the city of Pune and are working towards an expansion in their business.



EcoAd: Chain of Processes

Their clients include local pharmacies, restaurants, small shops, etc. Restaurants are their main clients. Their customers have gradually reduced their plastic carry bag consumption and are opting for paper bags. They have noticed that about nine out of the 15 pharmacies that they sell their products to have completely stopped using plastic bags. EcoAd receives funding support from their corporate partners. EcoAd cost lines are explained in the following image:



■ Salary (75%) ■ Rent (13%) ■ Transportation (5%) ■ Other (7%)

EcoAd: Costlines

EcoAd has also initiated a 'Red Dot' campaign in collaboration with SwaCh, a non-profit organisation that works towards waste management and sustainable livelihoods for waste pickers. In this campaign, they manufacture paper bags with a red dot on one of the sides of the bags. These bags are specially manufactured and sold for disposal of sanitary waste (sanitary pads, tampons, etc.). The red dot on the paper bag helps the waste workers to recognize the type of waste being disposed in those bags allowing them to handle it separately. The Red Dot Campaign has been productive in hygienic disposal of sanitary waste.



Women employees manufacturing paper bags

Performance

Environmental:

- According to an estimate made by EcoAd, they have managed to replace over 20 lakh plastic bags with their products till date (May 2017).

Social:

- EcoAd has helped over 220 women in the self-help groups from rural areas achieve a social status. They continue to help generate employment for more rural women.
- Their 'Red Dot' campaign has enabled better handling of sanitary waste.
- They have managed to influence the behaviour of people towards usage of recyclable paper bags, more people now prefer these paper bags over the plastic carry bags.

Business:

- EcoAd manufactures and sells about 80,000 to one lakh paper bags every month. They aim to reach a target of two lakh bags per month by the end of 2017.



Women attending workshop conducted by EcoAd

Barriers

- It was difficult to convince people to switch to paper bags from plastic bags in the initial phases of the business. This problem will only be addressed if people become environmentally conscious.
- The demand of paper bags becomes uncertain during monsoon seasons, which affects their business.
- Although the manufacturing quality has been standardized by them, sometimes the products fail to meet these standards which may result in late delivery of the products.

Future Scope

EcoAd aims to completely stop the usage of plastic carry bags in the country one day. They are planning to start sale in Mumbai by 2017. Once they have established a market, they will set up manufacturing units in the city and continue to employ women from rural areas. EcoAd in the next three years aims to establish franchises in 10 major cities and collaborate with governments to take action towards promoting use of recycled paper bags. Once these franchises are established they will target small cities and towns. They are targeting cities where plastic ban has been imposed to

build a rapid and sustainable market. They intend to scale up and manage local franchises in different cities. They are working towards expansion by approaching other organisations.

Compiled by:

Jenisha Kiri