



Social and Relationship Capital

Enabling communities to thrive has been a key focus area of our organisational approach. As an institution that is active among diverse socio-economic communities across rural and urban India, we are equipped to play a leading role in helping the society progress and become resilient.

Axis Bank's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) philosophy is to make meaningful and measurable contributions to the progress of communities by creating timely and pertinent opportunities around livelihoods, education, health, and financial inclusion.

Our CSR interventions, aligned to Clause 135 of the Companies Act 2013 and all the subsequent rules made thereunder, are overseen by the Board of the Bank, guided by the CSR Committee of the Board, and aligned to our CSR Policy.

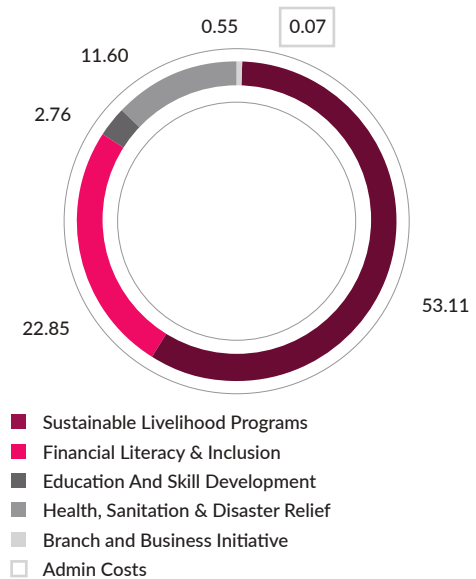
Axis Bank's CSR interventions spanned sustainable livelihoods, education and skill development, financial inclusion, and supporting India's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in FY 2020-21, reaching 28 states and 5 Union Territories in India. The Bank's CSR interventions are led directly, through the Axis Bank Foundation (ABF) or its implementation partners.

The Bank publishes the Annual Report on CSR as part of its Annual Report that provides in greater detail the Bank's CSR governance, activities, and investments. The Annual Report on CSR can be accessed on pages 154-157 of the Annual Report 2020-21.

 [Annual Report 2020-21](#)

www.axisbank.com/docs/default-source/annual-reports/for-axis-bank/annual-report-for-the-year-2020-2021.pdf

CSR Expenditure 2020-21 (in ₹ Crores)



Axis Bank Foundation

Registered as a charitable trust in 2006, ABF has since been working towards CSR efforts of the bank.

Message from ABF Chairman

"In addition to battling the current COVID 19 pandemic, rural India is faced with an increasing number of challenges, such as climate change, erratic weather patterns, depleting natural resources, deforestation and pollution, all of which are severely impacting their lives and livelihoods.

Axis Bank Foundation, through its Sustainable Livelihoods

programme, provides rural communities with alternate avenues of income and helps them conserve and sustainably manage existing natural resources. Through our 'Mission2Million' program, we aim to positively impact two Million households by 2025."

S Ramadorai
Chairperson, Axis Bank Foundation



Sustainable Livelihoods Programme

Our aim is to make rural communities self-reliant and resilient through our Sustainable Livelihoods programme since 2011. It has a two-fold focus:

- Bolstering rural livelihoods
- Developing skills for youth and People with Disabilities (PwDs) in rural and peri-urban areas to increase their employability

Bolstering Rural Livelihoods

The Programme provides rural communities with equitable access to stressed natural resources, chief among them being water, given that the communities are heavily water dependent, as they earn their livelihoods from agriculture and agriculture-allied activities. Additionally, adequate water availability through the year for drinking, hygiene, sanitation and livelihood practices is also a key sustainability indicator.

Over the preceding decades, climate change, deforestation, pollution, exploitation of groundwater and a variety of factors have left India's rural communities in severe water stress, which has far-reaching effects on agricultural outputs and consequently their livelihoods. They also face considerable uncertainty surrounding the availability of potable water for their daily needs, and without strategic intervention, their future generations will be faced with even more acute water shortages.

To improve rural livelihoods, ABF and its partner NGOs focus on solving challenges related to farm productivity and access to affordable credit and market linkages. At the same time, they equip volunteers (Community Resource Persons) from communities by organising communities into groups, with relevant knowledge and skills.

To mitigate such scenarios from occurring, ABF has partnered with leading NGOs nationally to facilitate solutions, designed with active participation and ownership of the communities themselves, for the various hurdles faced by Indian rural communities to stabilise their lives and livelihoods.

The Foundation is progressing towards its Mission 2 Million target it took in FY 2017-18 to reach 2 Million households by 2025 under the Sustainable Livelihoods Programme. The Programme reached 0.92 Million households (including trainees) and the Foundation was active in 198 districts as on 31 March 2021.

 **Axis Bank Foundation's work**
www.axisbankfoundation.org/



Facilitating the Continuous Flow of Resources

Under the Sustainable Livelihoods programme, ABF supports diverse interventions focused on the management of natural resources – land, soil, biodiversity, and water – in rural communities. Land use management entails the identification of common land for livestock grazing and the collection of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) and biomass fuel, and engaging the community to create rules around the equitable use of the resources in a way that ensures conservation and regeneration of their productive value. Additionally, practices around soil aim to prevent erosion, retaining moisture, and sequestering carbon.

Water management is an extensive part of the Programme to ensure perennial water security for rural communities, and it has facilitated watershed management, repairs of existing structures, construction of groundwater recharge wells, plantation of trees and water usage planning for local water bodies. Many activities have been implemented under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) and applied across both traditional systems such as 'doha' and 'phad' in Maharashtra or tanks in Tamil Nadu and newer lift, drip and solar-based irrigation systems.

Watershed Project for Sustainable Livelihood

Kendla Balkha of Parewa village in Chhattisgarh cultivated just enough maize and wheat and reared livestock to meet his household needs.



However, becoming a part of the ABF-supported, High Impact Mega Watershed project, conducted in partnership with Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation (BRLF), turned out to be a very prudent decision for him. The project aimed to facilitate access to irrigation through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREG). A few weeks later, Kendla and a few other villagers enrolled for the construction of a farm pond under MGNREGS for which they also earned wages.

Training support

In the following monsoon the pond was filled with rainwater. Kendla was soon planning what crops he could grow, with the pond now reducing water stress during the dry spells, and he also attended trainings on improved agricultural methods such as vegetable cultivation and organic farming. Kendla chose to

cultivate vegetables and pulses on the boundaries of their newly constructed farm pond to prevent the soil from sliding back into the pond during the monsoons.

Inspiring others

The project helped Kendla to cultivate various crops for his own consumption and also sell the surplus in the market to bolster his cash earnings. Kendla is now cultivating chillies, tomatoes, bottle gourds, bitter gourds, pigeon pea in pulses and wheat and has also started cultivating fish to supplement his income.

One farm pond has significantly diversified and secured the livelihoods of a household, in addition to providing a shield to protect the household from external shocks such as price fluctuations or crop failure. Kendla's experience has inspired his neighbours who are keen to be a part of this project.

Enhancing water storage capacity of existing water bodies

The Mahasivanendhal Kanmoi, a traditional water body (also called a natural tank), is situated in Mahasivanendhal village in Tamil Nadu. About 40 farmers from the village were using the tank's water for cultivation on their farmlands as well as for household purposes. There are two additional tanks in the village used for the same purpose. The tank had not been renovated for three decades, thus weakening its boundaries, and reducing its carrying capacity due to silt deposits and unwanted vegetation.

Coming together to build a strong movement

ABF's project in partnership with Dhan Vayalagam Tank Federation (DVTF) brought the farmers together into a tank management association which proposed to desilt the tanks to increase its water-holding capacity and strengthen its boundaries in order to reduce water loss.

The villagers were aligned with the importance of strengthening tanks and the need for the association, which chalked out a detailed plan of physical works, identified compatible machineries, and finalised wages and prepared the labour roster.

The tanks were renovated as planned before the onset of monsoons and were soon filled up with rainwater, which benefited the villagers immediately in their cultivation and household requirements. Due to improved water availability, the village could expand the area under cultivation. After the monsoons, the farmers purchased 5,000 fish fingerlings to grow in the tanks, which, once grown, were sold for profit that was utilised for village development activities. Farmers reaped a good harvest of both paddy and pulses and also secured adequate fodder for their livestock from their crops.

Inspired by Mahasivanendhal village's success, neighbouring villages approached the project team to help renovate tanks in their villages, thereby bringing more tanks under community management.



Promoting Profitable Agriculture

Towards promoting profitable agriculture among India's small and marginal farmers, ABF has supported interventions around crop planning, mulching, the use of organic inputs and multi-cropping that have helped improve their overall income and protect against conditions that could cause crop failures. Many farmers under the programme have further supplemented their incomes by planting cash crops under the multi-cropping system or taken up horticulture, floriculture and cultivation of medicinal plants.

Farmers have benefited greatly from better water management practices, which include solar-powered lift irrigation, levelling of fields to prevent water runoff, planning equitable distribution of water resources and promoting crops that require less water in arid regions. These practices have resulted in steady, dependable water supply to farms, improved soil moisture retention capacity and recharged groundwater levels to create a continuous cycle of economic stability.

Adding Liquidity to Livestock Assets

Across India, many small and marginal farmers or landless people often engage in manual labour to sustain their food and cash availability. To break this cycle, ABF is supporting the promotion of livestock rearing as an alternate means of income for such farmers.

ABF supports households on practices including breed improvement, conservation of indigenous breeds, breed replacement, nutrient management and disease management and have also created a cadre of para-veterinary workers to provide emergency medical services to minimise livestock mortality.

With soil and water conservation practices, livestock rearing becomes a viable option among rural communities because of better availability of natural fodder. For many landless households, this has become a primary source of income.

Importantly, livestock becomes a source of emergency income in times of crop failure or from lack of labour opportunities.

Sharpening Entrepreneurial Edge

ABF's focus on building integrated livelihood value chains supports and nurtures local entrepreneurs in rural communities, wherein small businesses and micro enterprises create market linkages that allow for specialisation in various roles such as agriculture (procuring quality inputs, cultivating saplings in nursery for improving farm production), livestock entrepreneurship, processing farm and livestock produce, and creating and marketing value-added products.

With the Foundation's support in creating business plans to secure financing, entrepreneurs, especially women, have been able to set up home-based businesses and achieving financial independence.

Pooling Human Resources

The Foundation promotes various groups among communities which provide participative platforms for decision-making and implementation, equitable use of natural resources, timely maintenance of soil and water structures, strengthening bargaining power and improving access to affordable credit and formal markets. Such groups include Village Development Committees (VDCs), Village Level institutions (VLIs), Producer Groups (PGs), Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), Co-Operatives, Self Help Groups (SHGs), Federations and Water User Groups (WUGs).

VDCs lead village development plans by liaising with the Gram Panchayats and supervising their implementation and PGs and FPOs empower farmers through collective bargaining, bulk purchasing of inputs and eliminating middlemen in selling of produce.

SHGs have given women an identity, honed their leadership skills, financial literacy and decision-making powers, while promoting savings, providing access to affordable credit to expand livelihood opportunities. WUGs manage soil and water works, not only building and maintaining structures such as tanks and wells, installing lift irrigation systems, minor irrigation canals and bunds and promoting tree plantation, but also governing water usage by systematic seasonal crop planning to ensure local water bodies are recharged for the entire year.

Enhancing Employability through Skill Development

ABF invests in training for rural and peri-urban youth and persons with disabilities (PwDs) to increase their employability in the organised economy. The participants are trained in diverse vocational skills and are guided towards suitable career paths. Post training, students are helped to find employment or in entrepreneurial set ups; and the PwD participants are supported to find employment in inclusive work environments, where employers have been sensitised.

The Foundation's long-term partnerships ensure that the community groups and processes initiated during the engagements outlive the project periods and are independently continued by the participant communities.



Axis Cares

Axis Cares is the Bank's employee engagement programme providing Axis Bank employees an opportunity to donate to support various causes. Through the payroll donation programme employees support six main areas that broadly focus on supporting children, elderly from marginalised communities, wildlife protection, environmental causes and help towards preserving Indian heritage.

Partnership-driven Rural Mobilisation

The pandemic has tested the grit of rural communities to the maximum as they were hit by multiple disruptions to their livelihoods. Farmers could not reach their fields and markets, quality inputs became scarce, seasonal (monsoon and winter) cropping cycles were impacted and livestock farmers had to sell at distress rates.

Volunteers from the communities and grassroots leaders, honed and anchored by ABF's projects, came forward, led online training sessions in small groups to ensure quality of participation and knowledge transfer to mobilise action and community leaders were at the helm of field operations, ably collaborating with local government institutions. Similarly, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and farmer groups facilitated aggregation for sale of harvested products as well as procurement of agricultural inputs and government bodies were quick in sanctioning work and releasing wages under

the MGNREGS to the workers. Here too, CRPs worked towards raising awareness about government schemes among the locals and facilitated the sanction of new job card applications.

SHGs ensured that necessary support via grocery kits, grain distribution, and interest free loans reached the most vulnerable first and some groups took up the opportunity to start timely activities like mask-making which also helped the SHGs raise revenues.

Notably, alumni from the Foundation's various skilling programmes were returning to their homes. Programme staff counselled them and other distressed families and connected those who lost their jobs to new job opportunities, while others were retained and for some, work-from-home arrangements were facilitated.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The lockdowns and restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted each and every individual, but arguably the ones who have been worst affected are the economically disadvantaged communities, including the large numbers of returning migrants.

The Foundation and its partner NGOs actively aligned with community groups, people on the ground, and various government agencies to support affected individuals and communities in various parts of the country.

ABF interventions and support ranged from providing basic food, hygiene supplies and rations, to creating awareness

about the pandemic among the rural communities. ABF, with the help of its partner NGOs, provided kits, with food, medical and hygiene supplies, across multiple cities to economically-weaker households and vulnerable communities including migrant workers. The Foundation also helped to link people to Public Distribution shops for obtaining emergency rations. Additionally, the Foundation sponsored PPE kits and other essentials to first responders and other frontline workers and initiated local production of masks to ensure a steady supply to communities at an affordable price.

Bank-led Programmes

Axis DilSe in Manipur

Axis Bank launched its flagship programme Axis DilSe in the North-eastern state of Manipur in April 2020, partnering with the Sunbird Trust as a 3-year programme to strengthen and upgrade the Lyzon Friendship school, a school focusing on the rural poor and tribal children in the region, and help develop other support facilities for the rural community in its vicinity, in the Singngat division of Churachandpur district in Manipur.

Under Axis DilSe, the Bank is supporting a significant expansion in the school's physical and educational infrastructure, pedagogy and teaching methodologies, and creating enabling infrastructure to enable the school to play a larger role in the sustainable economic development of the region, over a period of three years.

During the COVID-19-induced lockdown, the school continued to educate students using the worksheets method, deploying tabs for digital learning, and using a play-based intervention to ensure continuity in teaching. The Bank augmented the school's digital learning capabilities through 50 tabs that were especially provided to the school to aid digital learning. Even when the school was closed, the teachers continued to impart lessons to students at their respective homes in small groups, thus ensuring continued learning.

The school's efforts to continue imparting education to students even during the lockdown has been greatly appreciated by the community and has resulted in the school strength increasing from 250 to 366, as well as an increase in staff strength.



Axis Bank Scholarship Programme at Ashoka University

With an aim to establish a legacy in supporting higher education in India, Axis Bank has associated with Ashoka University to launch the Axis Bank Scholarship Program at the university, wherein the Bank shall provide academic scholarships for up to 30 female students studying in the 3-year undergraduate programme in any of the STEM disciplines offered by the University, over a 5 year period from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25. In FY 2020-21, 10 meritorious students had been selected from economically-weaker backgrounds by the University, each receiving between 50 to 65% support towards annual tuition.



“While in my final year of school, I started looking for a college that would allow me to challenge myself and expand my horizons further. This is when I came across Ashoka. As I read more about the undergraduate programme, it felt like the perfect fit for me. The scholarship has helped ease the financial burden on my parents to a great extent.”

My experiences at Ashoka are helping me learn and grow, not just academically, but as an individual. This would not have been possible without the Axis Bank Scholarship.”

Parnika Vaid

Axis Bank Scholar and Undergraduate Class of 2023,
Ashoka University

The Museum of Solutions, Mumbai

In FY 2020-21, the Bank came on board to support the Museum of Solutions, a state-of-the-art children's museum being built in Lower Parel, Mumbai. The Museum, being developed by the JSW Foundation, is slated to open in FY 2022-23 and shall be as a unique, experiential learning space for the Lakhs of children in the City.

Project Akshar

Project Akshar is a financial literacy Initiative by Axis Bank and is one of India's largest free e-learning platforms to spread credit awareness among the people. Launched in 2017, Project Akshar uses an interactive and gamified approach to helping people improve their knowledge of credit awareness and financial literacy. The Program offers a knowledge Bank to its users that comprise of lessons, blogs, quizzes, scenarios and infographics on credit reporting and financial management.

The Program has touched over 12 Lakhs participants since inception, with a significant participant base from tier 2 and tier 3 cities, and the rural areas. The number of registered users on Akshar was over 4.4 Lakhs as on 31 March 2021.

Key highlights from the Program in the reporting year include:

- 60,000+ active users reported an improvement in their credit scores
- During the lockdown, developed new financial literacy content on managing money during the crisis, and on

using internet and mobile-based banking (Over 2 Lakhs participants engaged)

- Integrated with CIBIL CreditView platform to provide free CIBIL report to participants
- Increased social media presence and active on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram
- Developed a survey to understand the changes in customer profile and propensity to pay during lockdown and moratorium
- Introduced a suite of products and widgets on moratorium such as personalised chatbots for moratorium calculation, moratorium calculator, quizzes, lessons, infographics, and FAQs (engaged over 2.5 Lakhs participants, with over 1.75 Lakhs participants using the moratorium calculator)
- The Program witnessed 70% higher content consumption during the lockdown

Going forward, the Program is planning to offer additional resources and tools for those facing the risk of delinquencies and creating financial tools that can help participants better control their finances. Additionally, the Program is looking to develop a financial dictionary that can serve as an educational as well as reference tool. The Program is also looking to introduce personalised chatbots for solving credit-related queries.

Project Akshar has a strong following among users from India's tier 2 and 3 cities, and now the Program aims to enhance its focus on supporting financial literacy among women.

Financial Empowerment through Axis Sahyog Retail Microfinance Initiative

Since 2018, the Bank has been undertaking financial literacy and financial inclusion interventions under the umbrella of Axis Sahyog, its retail microfinance program, to benefit from the program's reach across grassroots India and the expertise of the feet on ground associated with it. The programme primarily focuses on enhancing financial literacy, promoting preventive healthcare and sanitation, and increasing financial inclusion coverage through pertinent government and other social schemes, and collectively, touched over 9.6 Lakhs lives in FY 2020-21.

The programme follows a face-to-face format wherein the program's representatives meet and interact with participant groups, and the Bank and its implementation partners organise activities such as street plays, magic shows, and even creating a classroom environment where participants

are directly engaged with. Many of these activities were curtailed due to the restrictions and precautions from the pandemic. The Bank deployed additional means to reach programme-participants, including scaling its digital reach, all the while following high standards of safety protocols.

Financial Literacy Program

In this intervention, beneficiaries, primarily women, are educated on diverse financial planning and awareness topics in an audio-visual format displayed on tablets, focused on inculcating prudent spending habits, budgeting and protecting themselves from fraudulent financial activities.

Government Social Service Schemes

Under the program, the Bank raises awareness among the target participants on pertinent government Schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), including helping them access and avail such schemes smoothly.

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Health Awareness

Additionally, beneficiaries are educated on the significance of maintaining health and hygiene for their overall financial security.

Providing Relief to Disaster-affected Zones

At a time when the country is battling the COVID-19 pandemic, several states in the country such as Assam, Bihar and West Bengal also had to face debilitating floods, resulting in damaged infrastructure, loss of lives, livestock and crops, and impacting sources of income for many. At relief camps, social distancing norms and safety precautions were challenged as those affected had to huddle together in cramped spaces. In several states, the Bank stepped up its disaster relief activities and provided those affected with relief kits that contained essential items such as disinfectants, food, sanitary pads, mosquito nets and soaps.

COVID-19 Awareness Programme- Sachetana

During the year, the financial literacy program added a new initiative under it - 'Sachetana', towards taking a more focused approach to educating the target participants on taking the necessary preventive measures to protect themselves and their families from the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach includes educating participants on the common symptoms attached to the virus, so they can get timely help and isolate themselves and informing them on nearest COVID-19 centres for any pandemic-related assistance.

COVID-19 Support to First Responders

Since the beginning of the calendar year 2020, Axis Bank has been actively aiding the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic and undertaking various response, relief and recovery measures towards supporting first responders such as police departments, municipal corporations, district authorities and civil hospitals as well as civil society in coping with and recovering from the socio-economic challenges brought about by the pandemic. The Bank's direct CSR support to the various agencies in FY 2020-21 reached close to 150 districts in 20 states in India.

