

**Big changes usually start out** with small, out-of-the-box initiatives focussed on improving people's lives. It is such initiatives that the EMPI-Indian Express Innovation Awards seek to reward. The awards are geared towards recognising organisations — whether in the government, corporate or development sector — which, through the implementation of unique ideas or processes, have been able to benefit a large number of people at the grassroots level. The winners of the fourth EMPI awards, announced earlier this month, were a mix of government, non-government and private initiatives, all of which had succeeded in taking an established idea and tweaking it to achieve path-breaking results. Among the eight gold trophy winners were: government undertakings



Unique Identification Authority of India (UIADI) Chairman Nandan Nilekani with the winners of the EMPI-Indian Express Awards. EXPRESS

like the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam and Nagpur Municipal Corporation; NGOs like the Akshaya Patra Foundation, INTACH and Pratham Education Initiative; and private players like Arvind Eye Care and Samtel Display Systems.

# The Idea Awards

## INTACH

**"For their innovative initiatives in restoration, preservation and enrichment of India's diverse cultural heritage embedded in communities and simultaneously improving the living conditions of communities."**

THE Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, registered in 1984 as a society, has become the saviour of many a building that could have easily given way to a glitzy mall. The Vysial Street in Pondicherry will testify to the truth of the above citation. It was INTACH that came to its rescue when land owners were being lured by land sharks. The outcome of the intervention was a 50,000 Euro model street restoration project that restored the facades of 20 traditional houses and put in place four new buildings designed to harmonise with the traditional streetscape. This harmony is what won INTACH the gold trophy. The project also won the UNESCO Asia Pacific Award of Merit 2008.

INTACH realises that the stakeholders — those who live in and around the buildings it helps preserve — are crucial to the long-term success of the project. INTACH's craft, community & heritage director Bindu Manchanda, speaking at the panel discussion after



Bindu Manchanda, Craft & Heritage Director, INTACH

receiving the award, chose to dwell on the self help groups formed, and the marketing and designing skills training given to people in the area.

"The heritage building can become a liability for these people. Why not a modern building, why not a mall, they think," Manchanda observed. She narrated an incident regarding the Jaisalmer Fort, which has been conserved by INTACH. "None of the 200 havelis around it had toilets. People were still using the area around the fort. That depressed us a lot... it was just not right. We put in 200 toilets, we felt that we had done a great job," she recalled.

However, Manchanda noticed that people were still not using the toilets, some of which had even been converted into extra rooms. She finally asked an old woman what the matter was. "Ammma, we have installed such good toilets for you, but you still do not use them. They have become useless now," she told the woman.

"The woman simply replied: 'It is impossible for me to consider a closed room as a toilet'," said Manchanda. It was then that the people at INTACH realised that it was futile to expect the elders to suddenly come out of their old mindset, so they chose to focus on the younger population of the area, encouraging them to set an example. Consequently, more people, especially the younger women, have started using the toilets.

## Pratham India Education Initiative for Read India -- A Movement

**"For developing an innovative approach to children's learning through intensive and extensive field studies and its delivery based on mobilising people's involvement to provide quality education to underprivileged children."**

ESTABLISHED in 1994 to work among Mumbai's slum children, Pratham today describes itself as India's "largest non governmental organisation working to provide quality education to the underprivileged children." The Read India initiative, as programme director Rukmini Banerjee puts it, was driven by the question, "What are our children learning in school?"

"They were learning, but they were not learning enough... That frustration with our own efforts led us to develop a very simple method that allows the child to read fluently within 60 days. Once you are convinced that you can do it, it is much easier to convince other people to do it," said Banerjee on the origins of the Read India project.



Dr Rukmini Banerjee, Programme coordinator

The project's national launch was in the year 2007 and there has been no looking back since. Read India aimed at teaching all Std I children at least alphabets and numbers, all Std II children to read at least words and do simple sums, all Std III-V children to at least read simple texts fluently and confidently solve arithmetic problems.

The results have been impressive. By 2008-09, the campaign has reached 33 million children across 19 states. It has covered 305,000 out of the 600,000 villages of India and mobilised 450,000 volunteers. Over 600,000 teachers and government workers have been trained under the ambitious programme.

In most states, out of the children who were a part of the intervention, the proportion of those not able to read alphabets has come down to zero. Likewise, the proportion of children able to

read simple sentences has also gone up by almost 20 per cent. The soon-to-be-launched Read India II programme, which is a three-year project, will focus on higher levels of academic content, focusing on subject-specific and grade-specific content for Std V-VIII.

## Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam

**"For their innovative approach that has enabled Gujarat to become the first state in India to achieve 100 per cent village electrification."**

THE project, called Jyoti Gram Yojna, segregated rural power feeders, classifying them separately for agricultural and non-agricultural customers. Agricultural feeders supplied power exclusively to agricultural consumers while the latter category, called Jyoti Gram Feeders, supplied to residential, commercial and industrial consumers.

The programme started in 2003 as a people's initiative and was later taken up by the state government, which gave it full grant. In 30 months'

time, it had covered all 18,065 villages of Gujarat and the 9,680 suburbs attached to them. The result is uninterrupted power supply to all villages. Of the total Rs 1,290 crore spent in the project, the Gujarat government has contributed Rs 1,110 crore. The project has ensured a minimum three hours continuous supply of three-phase supply to agricultural consumers.

"The state of Gujarat has acute water scarcity. One of the objectives was to bring about the sustainable use of groundwater resources that was supposed to be achieved through controlled and regulated water supply to the agricultural sector while at the same time improving the quality in terms of reliability and voltage stability. During the last three-four years, we have not had a single case of load-shedding in the villages," said L Chuaungo, commissioner of GUVN.



L Chuaungo, GUVN Commissioner

## Nagpur Municipal Corporation

**"For their innovative design and use of information technology to provide a single-point multiple healthcare services to the citizens."**

THE objective was clear and simple. "We wanted to reach out to people and we wanted to show that we care," said Deputy Commissioner R Z Siddiqui. The result was that a citizens' helpline, a large database of handy contact details, was created, which could be accessed by phone call, SMS or through the internet.

The most laudable achievements have been in the crucial healthcare field. The contact details of registered eye donors as well as willing blood donors are up on the Nagpur Municipal Corporation's website.

Also available are a list of ambulance services operating in the town.

After setting up individual services, the corporation successfully tried its hand at managing the vast pool of ambulances during emergencies. "We then started Dial 102 (service). We pooled in all ambulance numbers and installed GPRS devices in each vehicle. When we get a call, we look at which ambulance is close to the spot. An SMS goes out to the driver," explained Siddiqui.

The corporation is also working in the direction of making the practice of circumcision more healthy. "The process was being carried out without much medical support and causing much discomfort to the child. We are trying to convince the maulvis and the doctors and have started to institutionalise the procedure," Siddiqui added.



R Z Siddiqui, Dy Commissioner

## Madhya Pradesh Forest Department

**"For designing and successfully implementing an innovative system that represents a paradigm shift in forest management."**

"MADHYA Pradesh has a forest cover of 100 sq km. We have around 22,000 villages in and around forests. A population of about 30 million intricately involved and dependent on the forest," said MP Additional Principal

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Anil Oberoi, drawing attention to the problem of keeping an eye on the forest fires and "rampant" offences. The project, started in 2007, has seen the distribution of about 7,000 in-house personal digital assistants to various personnel

of the forest department. These "palmtops" combine a varied number of technologies — GIS, GPS, GPRS and GSM to perform multiple functions. Put simply, the department is planning to equip every employee on the field with a smart phone. The device can be used to make calls, take photos of important incidents and log on to the internet for using email.

In one stroke, a number of problems were solved, and the working of the department itself underwent a revolutionary change. "Thanks to remote sensing, we are alerted by satellite about the location of forest fires. The system sends SMSs and emails to concerned officials, who then take charge," said Oberoi.

Transparency is given as data is logged and tabulated real-time. Individual forest officials have to log in with a password which makes the system foolproof and easy to monitor.



Anil Oberoi, Forest Service officer

## Arvind Eye Care System

**"For its innovative remote-diagnosis system structured to provide timely and affordable specialised eye screening for prevention of diabetes-triggered vision loss."**

THE first Arvind Eye Hospital was started in 1976 by Dr G Venkataswamy. They now call themselves "the largest and most productive eye care facility in the world." From April 2009 to March 2010, Arvind's system handled over 2.5 million out patients and organised 300,000 surgeries.

The Arvind Eye Care System encompasses five hospitals, three managed eye hospitals, a manufacturing centre for ophthalmic products,

an international research foundation and a resource and training centre. "They (diabetic retinopathy patients) don't come to us when the disease is treatable, but only when treatment becomes much more difficult. We want to catch these patients at the earliest stage, and we go out into the community very often to screen patients. But trying to identify retinopathy in people was like looking for a needle in a haystack," said Dr Kim Ramasamy, programme director.

"One of the things we could do was opportunistic screening. When patient goes to a diabetologist or a physician, and is screened for any retinopathy, the technology can be used to transfer the retinal photos to the base hospital where ophthalmologists can view them and give a report. Hence, only the affected need to go to the hospital," said Ramasamy.



Dr Kim Ramasamy, Director

## Samtel Display Systems

**"For their innovative approach towards indigenisation of high-technology display products."**

IT could be said that Samtel was awarded for venturing into spaces where few have dared to tread. Part of the Samtel Group, India's largest integrated manufacturer of a wider range of displays, SDS deals with high-technology products for avionics and military applications in both domestic and international markets.

Befittingly, it was Samtel's "courage" that was lauded by the jury at the awards. Samtel's products, according to the jury, were, "much needed by the country yet avoided by most industry players."

The company handles design, development, manufacture, testing, qualification, repair & maintenance and obsolescence management of

avionics products and equipment for military as well as commercial aircraft. Its products include Color Avionic Tubes (CAT), Multi Function Displays (MFD), Head Up Displays (HUD), Helmet Mounted Displays (HMD), Automated Test Equipments (ATE) and IADS, as well as Control Displays for Armored Military Vehicles.

"No technology can get tougher than this. Imagine an aircraft flying at 2,000 kilometres per hour. Imagine a pilot doing a nose-dive at 9G-force, when his body weight becomes nine times the normal body weight. Imagine an aircraft parked at Ladakh trying to take off at -40 (degree Celsius) or temperatures lower than that. Imagine an aircraft parked at the Jodhpur airbase, and the cockpit is closed. The temperature inside rises to 85 or 90 degree Celsius," Rajiv Sethi from SDS said after receiving the award.

It is these frontiers that SDS has chosen to conquer.



Rajiv Sethi from Samtel

## Akshaya Patra Foundation

**"For pioneering an initiative to serve hot, freshly-cooked school meals, all six days of the week to over a million children."**

AKSHAYA Patra started operations in Bangalore in June 2000. "We started with five schools, feeding 1,500 children. The next three months, we started receiving letters of headmasters of other schools, government schools, requesting us to feed their children too... There were requests for about one lakh children. That was very revealing to us — how much a meal means to these children and families," said Vice Chairman CP Das.

The first centralised kitchen came up in ten months' time, feeding 30,000 children. Today,

Akshaya Patra has made it to the Limca Book of Records, feeding 12.5 lakh children in about 7,500 schools through 17 kitchens operating in eight states. The challenges were aplenty, and the foundation took them head-on, making them an opportunity to innovate. "When we decided to come to North India, there was the challenge of preparing rotis... if we were to feed 30,000-50,000 children, how were we going to do it? We met several people who were making papad machines, we invested some money, and we asked them to make bigger machines that could make more papads than the capacity of 2,000 papads per hour," said Das.

"We tried three different technologies. Two of them failed; one has worked very well. We were able to make a machine which can make 10,000 rotis per hour," he added. They have now gone further and produce 40,000 rotis per hour.



Mr C P Das, Vice Chairman