

RURBAN LIVING

Co creating Eco Habitats that celebrate living

April 2020

“While the technological aspects of the urban system are fairly well understood and can be manipulated, little is actually known about the influence that cities have exerted on the development of human potentialities and

therefore on the emergence of civilized life. Civilizations have flourished in cities for more than 5000 years, but they have difficulty in surviving the huge agglomerations of the contemporary world” - **Rene Dubos**



Resource-efficient neighborhoods

By Rakesh Koti

A strange thought occurred to me. Imagine your home is a black box and you are inside it with nothing else around you. Every resource that you would need – every bit of food that you eat, every watt of power that you burn, every drop of water that you drink, every bit of furniture on which you rest – is coming to you from outside this Black Box.

Now, extend the confines of this Black Box, to encompass your neighboring homes, maybe till the end of your street. Is your Black box big enough now to provide you with any of the resources mentioned above? How about if I extend to encompass your whole colony?

We are heavily dependent on resources from outside our communities for our survival. While this is a good thing, it also means that our resource-security is heavily dependent on something that is beyond our control. Overdependence on resources from outside is not



a good thing, especially during a pandemic. As an example, imagine the distance your food travels – from the farm to the transport facility, from the transport facility to the storage facility, from the storage facility to the distributor, from the distributor to local Kirana stores or supermarkets, from there to your homes, if you are lucky. Now, imagine the number of surfaces that it has touched and the number of hands it has changed. **Continues in the next page**



Eco-Habitats or Rurban Communities are, effectively, resource-efficient neighborhoods where this might be possible. Farmlands and Goshalas are an integral part of the design of Rurban communities. With high dependence on rainwater harvesting and power generation within the community, there is relatively high self-reliance and self-sufficiency, i.e. such communities show resilience during times of pandemics. This resilience can mean a great

deal when all it takes is for you to touch or breathe at the wrong place and at the wrong time to catch the flu.

P.S: The Russians had a similar idea in the way of Dachas, which were farmhouses on the outskirts of cities where food production took a central role in daily living. These Dachas were especially popular during the years before and after World War 2 when there was a shortage of food across the country.

Know about Organo Navira

Journey is the Destination - By Nagesh Battula

"I still remember the farmer vividly, from whom I bought a piece of land, even though more than 10 years have gone past. He was in need of money and I was in a state of surplus looking for a land to invest in. My intention was to build a farmhouse and start farming; an idea that everyone like me would have; of getting away from the city, growing my own veggies and having a healthy green environment for

relaxation. The farmer owned 3 acres of land and I wanted to acquire it but he was willing to sell only an acre because his financial need was only that much. His reasoning was that the money would disappear within no time if he sold all of it but he promised that he would do it eventually. On that note, we parted as happy people. He, having got what he wanted and I, in the hope of getting what I was looking for.

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My dream

Every now and then, I would visit the land and visualize a paradise. I had great plans; I wanted to build a farmhouse, grow veggies, have a few pets, a cow etc.

Also, I wanted to show my children the life in greener pastures. I wanted them to experience breathing fresh air, sleeping outdoors while gazing at the stars, see how milk is produced, how tomatoes are grown, the role of bees and butterflies in our lives and everything else that went into living a farm life.

How they shattered!

To begin with, I built a farmhouse with a natural pool, added a few rooms to accommodate domestic help, and fixed generator to ensure uninterrupted power supply. Next, I took expert advice for organic farming. All this not only costed me a lot of money but also brought in a number of associated issues I hadn't anticipated. Let me list them out here:-

- I had no expertise in farming. The borrowed knowledge led to disappointments, frustration and despair. My experimentation with farming turned out to be a failure.
- Running a farmhouse wasn't as easy as I thought. I was using it as a weekend getaway but every time I got there, I encountered several issues.

- Money was going down the drain. Leave aside earning money from farming like I had expected, I only ended up spending for salaries of staff and failing crops.
- My wife felt insecure as it was a lonely place. My kids were least interested because there was no community around.
- I forgot my green building rules. I was fighting a lonely battle.

My dreams of an idyllic farm life for my family were shattered! At first, I was devastated. And then, I looked around. Was I alone in this situation? I had designed a few farmhouses before. Now, when I revisited them, I realised all the owners had similar tales to tell. Failure was not mine alone. That's what got me thinking.

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Epiphany

Most of us who live in the city have this innate urge to connect with nature. It's human instinct to connect with the five elements that are the essence of life. It's also human nature to aspire for growth and development. That is what drives rural people to sell their lands for better livelihood options. They don't believe that farming is a lucrative profession, any more. Both city dwellers and rural populace were discontent with their lot.

Resolution

Man is a social animal he is not cut out for a solitary life. Especially, as a family. We can live only in groups. We need to live collectively. That's fundamental. In one of those moments of introspection, a business idea was born as a solution to this problem.

The Big Idea

The problem of congestion in cities is plaguing the lives of urbanites and taking a toll on their spirit. Safe food, air, environment is what everyone is aspiring for. And the available real estate projects offering farming plots are not solving the core issue of farm living. The developers look at it solely from the business perspective without fulfilling the dwellers' expectations or aspirations. I thought if we could build a business filling that gap, we would be able to provide that ideal farm living.

The 'light bulb' experience to fill this gap, led to the business idea. People out there are looking for a second home, which can serve their purpose of living closer to nature, establishing connection to the food source, environment and people. A business idea of solving this problem was worth venturing into. I plunged into conceptualising an idea to create "rurban community." A typology which is unique and addresses this gap.

We started by naming our first Eco-Habitat "Naandi."



Knowing Organo Naandi

Organo Naandi is an urban farming community driven passionately by the ethos of “agro culture & sustainable organic farming”, an eco-habitat. Naāndi, Sanskrit for ‘the start’ is our first step towards change, a small attempt to connect to the lost thread of value systems and lifestyle native to our land, harmonizing it to the today’s necessities. In the evolution of our culture, disconnect to our roots and indigenous knowledge systems inevitably happened as most of us moved away from our native occupation of farming. This drifting away happened over 3-4 generations now. In this cultural shift Organo Naandi is the first step towards a new paradigm of

living, a lifestyle of sustainable collective farming for urban dwellers. It offers the very best of both worlds – The RURBAN way of life – an ideal blend of urban comforts along with the advantages of rural life. It not only brings together the best of rural and urban lifestyles but also offers a rare platform to indulge in the living.

We, at Naāndi, believe that emancipation lies in reversing this cycle of ‘taking’ to ‘giving back’ to create a balance. ‘Naāndi’ was the beginning to achieve this balance.



The Organo Naandi paradigm of building communities is also sustainable as it moves from a consumer mindset to a producer's with the following objectives:

- To design and create a producer culture community that is based on self-reliant closed loop systems to meet its requirements.
- To design a community that is net-zero in terms of its energy usage.
- To achieve sustainability in all the three realms of running a community 1. People, 2. Profits and 3. Planet.



When two different sections of societies work together with a collective goal it exposes one to the other's knowledge systems, cultures and lifestyles. We believed that this would break the social barrier between the two which eventually will help in taking away the dichotomy of divide between the different sections of the society.

Over time Organo Naandi: "India's first collective farming community", has successfully created a ripple of change in the surrounding communities inspiring & advocating 'change' to help in the conservation and enhancement of ecology of the neighboring villages.

Who is an Eco-Habitat for?

An Eco-Habitat is for those who are looking for an alternative to urban lifestyle. A lifestyle that respects nature and its resources, a lifestyle that is self-sustaining and healthy. It is an alternative to urban dwellers who are used to all the urban comforts and conveniences yet have a keen interest in sustainable farming and healthy lifestyles. Naāndians have broken away from regular paradigms of living which is dependent on the grid for supplies; they belong to a producer paradigm. They belong to a society of people who are looking to add value in all the realms of life like social, personal, family, health and passion.



Why collective farming?

Collective farming is a farmer’s community that shares farming related infrastructure while enjoying the fruits of collective living. Farming is a laborious job, which includes a number of small tasks that need to be done right for results. As it is, farming is an unforeseen process where there are varied number of unanticipated issues of pests, irregular plant growth and supply of nutrition which only becomes adverse with conventional supply of power, water and labor each of which have their own set of uncertainties and irregularities. A sustainable collective farming community was co-created & designed to effectively counter all these conditions with a benefit of a healthy choice of living.



Organo Naandi Collective Farming

- Common farm infrastructure is shared by its residents
- Grid-free power sourcing
- Pooling of knowledge systems
- Regular hassle free up-keep and maintenance
- Sharing of profits and loss
- Water security is ensured as water harvesting and conservation works effectively for large areas.
- Expert care for the farm, energy, water and every aspect of the farm and living
- Active community that is run by professionals with process driven approach.
- Reliable work force in the farm due to the structured incentivize employment with a proper growth ladder.

Individual Farming

- High investment cost on farm infrastructure
- Unreliable grid power in the semi-urban areas
- High maintenance and upkeep costs
- High costs to employ experts and having no knowledge systems in the diverse farm fields.
- High chances of getting rundown if in-active for a small period of time.
- Maintenance of urban lifestyle in rural setting does not satisfy all the age groups of a family



Where are we today?

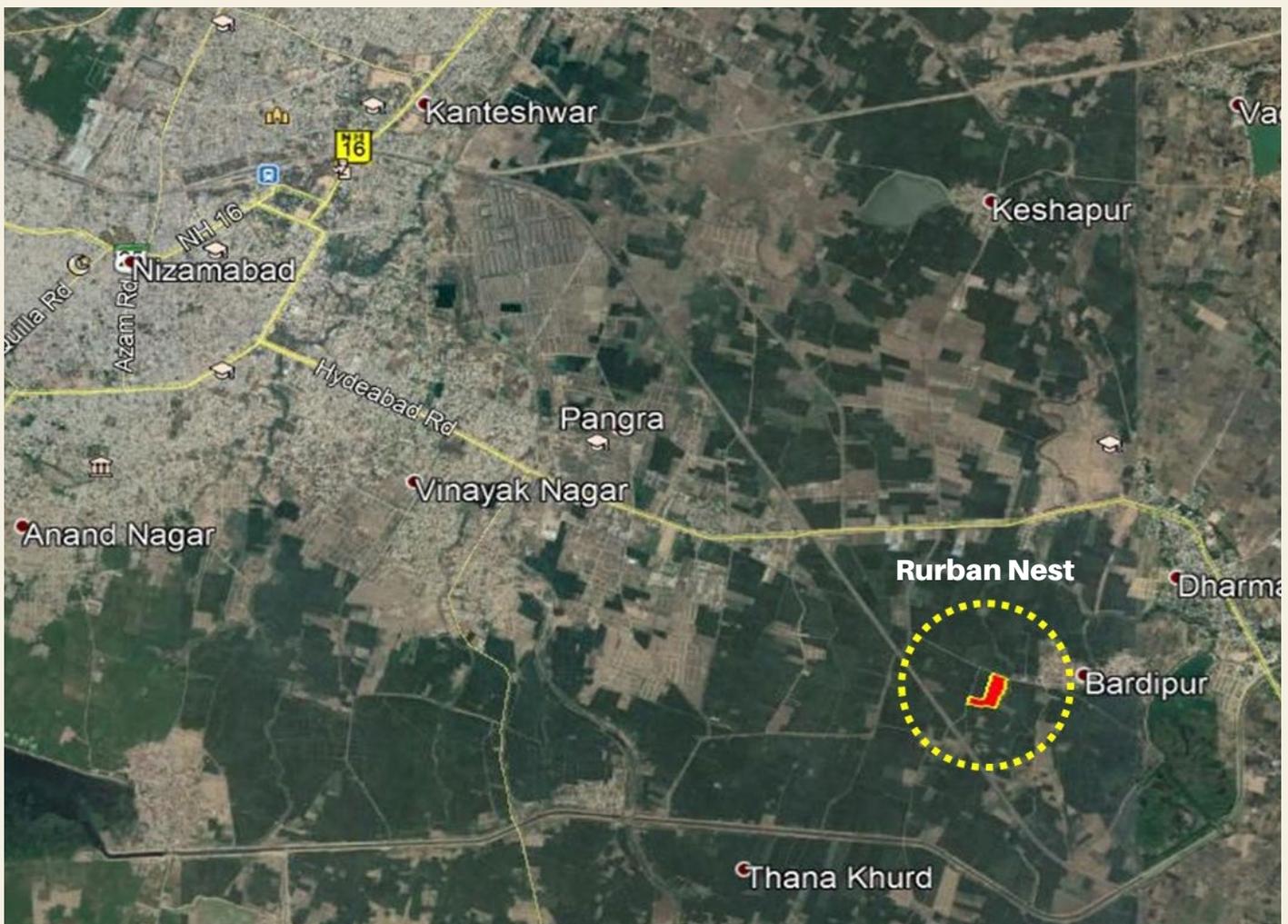
Organo Naandi has been handed over to its rightful owners - the Organo Naandians. I could not have run it as efficiently as they are collectively. Moreover, I am proud of them. In these testing times of COVID 19, all of them have proven themselves the ultimate drivers and doers. The spirit of Organo Naandians is exemplary and for me, that is the biggest reward.

Sometime, last year the vision of developing more eco-habitats took its first turn and we embarked on another exciting journey - Organo Antharam. Set in Chevella, the project has all the makings of yet another vibrant community.

Rurban Nest

The most interesting synchronism has been Rurban Nest. A group of doctors in Nizamabad was looking out for an organisation that could help build a sustainable community, which essentially is an eco-habitat. As Rumi said, what you seek is seeking you; they reached out to Organo after their intensive search. Now, we are mentoring them to reach their objectives.

Rurban Nest is aimed at reinventing unique experiences and provide you with a life of responsible comfort and luxury. Designed by our team, the farm villas are built to foster quintessential Organo living right in the heart of the beautiful natural farmlands of Nizamabad.



The Resilience of Eco-Habitats during Pandemics

by Rakesh Koti

Long ago, I remember my friend telling me a story about how the world is going to end in the year 2012. This was in primary school and I thought I still had plenty of time left to play football, eat junk food and more generally, have fun before the world comes crashing down. The image that my friend created was the one where meteors left holes big enough to gulp entire cities. The panic and ensuing chaos would make people run helter-skelter in all cardinal directions. But I must confess that I had to change my stance. Now, I would imagine the end of the world to be one filled with boredom and lethargy. And I would imagine it would happen sometime around noon when I'm watching a TV series for the 13th time and wondering if trousers will ever be made again.

Although we are - hopefully - far from any such cataclysm happening, the current situation shows a glimpse of how the urban population would handle a global crisis. We have been shown, as Bill Gates said in his TED Talk in 2015, "We are not ready for the next epidemic". We were not. But as he somewhat cheerfully ends his speech with "If there's one positive thing that can come out of the Ebola epidemic, its that it can serve as an early wake-up call, to get ready. If we start now, we can be ready for the next epidemic".

The current urban crisis has reached levels never before seen with Janata curfews, social distancing, and lockdowns. In the place that I live, in Kukatpally - one of the densest urban places in Hyderabad, the scenery is surreal.

Once a curse for all commuters, the roads have become eerily silent and devoid of life.

I live in a gated apartment complex with a density of 160 homes per acre. To put that in perspective, that is one person living for every 10 square yards. It is a good thing that people are living on top of each other. It is a bad thing, however, when it comes to maintaining social distancing and staying away from touching surfaces. The alternative - which is also my current reality - is to live inside homes locked up in concrete shells with a view, through windows, of more people living in concrete shells. No matter how socially distant we stay, viruses do not keep themselves to themselves. They have a way of crossing boundaries and entering into our lives because of our dependence on resources such as food and groceries from outside sources. Sanitizing sanitizers is not uncommon any more. While social distancing and lock downs are helping contain the spread of COVID-19, is there a way we could reduce our dependence on outside sources for food and maintain physiological & psychological health during these testing times?



Reducing Load on Government Infrastructure

"For the world seems never to offer anything worthwhile without also providing a dreadful opposite" - **Stephen Fry, Mythos: The Greek Myths Retold**

I have a confession to make: I like looking at ants and ant colonies. They fascinate me! This fascination is the result of so many unanswered questions that crop up in my mind when I see a colony of ants. How are they able to build such complex structures? Is there a Chief Architect in the colony drawing up blueprints and communicating in Ant Speak? Does the aggregation of instinctive behavior of each ant lead to a collective intelligence that is amazingly intricate? Maybe.

If so, where does the individual intelligence end and collective intelligence start? Scientists at Research Center on Animal Cognition in Toulouse, France, who share the same interest

as I - looking at ants moving around - but with more scientific vigor, have started to simulate the construction of complex ant hills using basic instinctive rules¹ such as detecting sand grains left by other ants using chemical markers. If there is an Ant Constitution, "Of the Colony, By the Colony and For the Colony" would be the motif.

But I will get to the point. Small steps taken at the micro-level can bring about big changes in the outcome at the macro-level. Unfortunately, like an untimely rain destroying an ant trail, the current crisis caused by COVID-19 has put a stop to any progress in the economy and is placing enormous stress on the government to provide basic necessities for the people. To provide food, power, water, essentials while the country is in a lockdown is not easy. A thank you is in order for all the people who are working so we stay back home.



But every little helps. Can we contribute in some small way to reduce the burden on the government during this critical time? Just like the ants, what is our instinctive individual responsibility to the people and planet?

This instinctive response, for us, is to develop eco-habitats. Eco-habitats reduce the load on government resources and infrastructure by

- Producing food through edible gardens within the community
- Producing fertilizers naturally within the community
- Generating power through renewable sources within the community
- Consuming water through rainfall and groundwater sources all within community
- Reducing waste going to landfills by reusing wet waste within the community
- Sending zero sewage into the government pipelines by treating the wastewater within the community

Another positive effect that this creates is to engage residents to get to work, dirty their hands and co-create towards making the community more self-reliant. For instance, at Organo Naandi, residents are coming together to help the community in various aspects of community management such as farming, waste management, composting, water management and power management. As the community is being run by the residents, avenues to reduce operational costs and improve efficiency are being identified. Frugality has become pervasive in the community. The lock down has also helped residents get used to working through virtual offices which saves time and improves mental & physical health.

The lock down has shown that an eco-habitat can help bring about individual actions towards the collective cause of not being a burden on the environment and by extension on the city infrastructure.



Voices from Rurban Nest



With the rapid infrastructural growth in India, the vertical expansion of buildings has not only taken over metropolitan cities but also the neighboring towns and mini metros. The urbanization and its side effects are fast engulfing the country and the urge to get away from it all has percolated across most smaller cities.

Nizamabad is no stranger to this phenomenon. However, what is heartening is that there are a few individuals who are not just complaining but also taking action to do whatever it takes to reverse the trend. Introducing Rurban Nest, conceived by a group of highly successful doctors and mentored by Organo...



Dr. Savita Rani,
Obstetrician & Gynecologist

"I was born and brought up in Hyderabad. My grandparents belong to Nizamabad. I moved to Nizamabad after my marriage and have been practicing for the last 15 years. Though we've achieved success and a luxurious lifestyle, this is not my dream life. This is not the kind of life I aspired for, but I was putting it off and thought we could get there after we retire.

Ideally, I would have loved to live close to nature but because of our profession, it hasn't been possible. If I want my grandchildren to

choose to spend time with me, I should offer what they don't get in the cities. I want them to take back stories and share it with their friends. And that is possible only if we live the life we love. A blend of rural and urban.

But then it didn't seem possible to create that kind of life - Living in the lap of nature, eating organic food grown in front of us, and yet have the urban comforts. But after we got Organo on board, I feel confident that we're moving closer to living my dream. The best part is, it's not just my dream, it's a collective dream of all of us in this community. Obviously, when a group of like-minded people come together, the mission becomes a realistic vision. And now, I don't have to wait till retirement; I can continue my practice at our hospital, it is just a 10-minute commute from here."



Dr. V. Chandra Sekhar Reddy,
Neuro-physician

"I moved to Nizamabad 15 years ago. I was born in a small village where the primary occupation was agriculture. We grew up in the farms, watching sunrise, working in the fields and going to school. After school, we would play with our friends till the sunset, get back home to have dinner and hit the bed. We had a super active life. This was our routine till we entered college. After that I got into medicine and studied for 10 long years.

Initially, I had thought of working in Hyderabad but couldn't handle the rapid urbanization. So, I chose Nizamabad to set up my practice, as it still had a blend of both. But life became so hectic that I had absolutely no time for anything else. The landscape of Nizamabad was changing rapidly too. And I started missing my childhood environment. I would often feel the urge to get back to the rural way of life, but it didn't seem like a possibility. Also, the fact that my children are missing out on the experience of natural living would bother me a lot. I used to feel terrible to see their hectic schedules. All they do in their free time is watch tv, play games on the cell phone. I feel deeply saddened by this.

Growing up was an exciting time during my

childhood. We spent our time climbing trees, swimming in clean natural water, exploring the wilderness... Today, children at school are unable to learn the life lessons they would through natural, instinctive exploration. They don't climb trees, meaning they never experience what it's like to fall off and bruise a leg. This means not learning persistence. They can't explore woods, meaning they never get to see the true natural beauty of the world around them. This leads them to be glued to external stimulation of gadgets. Finally, they swim in controlled pools, and end up with rashes and skin allergies. The worst of them all is the adulterated food they eat. From milk to cooking oils, nothing is pure.

When it comes to social interactions with the neighbours, it's not the same it used to be. When I began sharing my concerns with Dr. Srinivas, Dr. Prabhakar and others during our morning walk, they echoed the same feelings. So, we considered being a part of gated communities that were under progress but we couldn't find what we were looking for in terms of facilities or neighbourhood. That's when we felt strongly that we should acquire some land on the outskirts and develop our own community with a focus on producing organic food and exercise. After an extensive search over a period of 2-3 years, we finally identified the land and decided to build farm villas. It's our good luck that we found a mentor like Organo.

"We can't wait to move into Rurban Nest."



Dr. M. Prabhakar, Paediatrician

"I've been practising for the last 25 years. For the last 15 years, a group of us have

been going on our morning walks together. During our interactions, all of us shared the same concerns about the way we were living. Hectic working hours, pollution issues, food safety issues, next generation moving away from core values and such. So we decided to develop a farming community where we could breathe fresh air and eat organic food grown by us. One thing led to another and here we are, on the verge of seeing our dreams manifest at Rurban Nest. We got lucky with finding our mentor in Organo."

Organo Naandi in the times of Covid-19

Two weeks of lockdown have gone past. Most people have been struggling with the restricted environments, but I'm quite enjoying this rejuvenating period at home. And the one and only reason for this is that, my home is within the eco-habitat we co-created! I dread to imagine how it would have been, had we been living in the dense city!



Every morning, as we wake up to the melodious chirps of the birds amidst our lush green landscape, I am filled with a sense of awe. It feels good to see that we have abundant spaces for these beings to feel as much at home as us. Nothing has changed for them or maybe it has, if you go by the WhatsApp forwards of wild animals reclaiming their rightful share in the man-made spaces. Honestly, I don't feel affected much by the lockdown except that we've reorganised the way we're working. I've also made peace with the insecurity of losing business. I don't fret anymore like I used to a week ago.

When I see my wife plucking fresh vegetables from our backyard and when I see her and other Organo Naandians turning farmers, I get this strong feeling that we don't really need much. It reiterates my conviction that we are better off as an agrarian society rather than consumerists.'



I'm sure you'll agree with me that this lock down has brought us together to arrive at collective solutions on farming, animal husbandry, managing our waste instead of solely focusing on sanitising our hands. Our collective knowledge and wisdom on all the aspects of eco-living are increasing each passing day. Be it, farming, vermi composting, water or power concerns. We've learnt to be happy with minimalism.

Work culture is moving to virtual offices, thereby saving our time and resources that are required for commuting. We're learning something new every day.

Organo Naandians have become self-reliant figuring out ways and means to collectively fulfil their needs. The consequence - reduced



operational costs and self-sufficiency. Isn't that phenomenal when compared to a consumerist society? For instance, community volunteers have totally mastered farm water management, de-weeding, and are having fun with harvesting. The added advantage of reduced costs is incidental. Similar is the case with monitoring power cuts in our on-grid solar power generation system and calibration of back-up time on diesel power generation. Reduced demand on fuel consumption has also reduced costs in some areas.



We're now comfortable with picking up milk and veggies for each other which has resulted in deep bonding and energising interactions.

While the rest of the world is struggling with coming-to-terms with the current reality, we as a community have used the time constructively to strengthen our Rurban way of life. I see this becoming a sub-culture across the world, in the times to come. Frugality is the new reality that everyone will embrace. Honestly, is there a better choice?

Children are not only signing up for more activities like art and active sports rather than video gaming all the time, while their education has shifted to digital class rooms.

Let's not waste waste

At Organo, nothing goes waste. Not even the left-over food or animal waste. Waste management is a specialised area that is handled with utmost planning, care and responsibility by every individual in Organo Naandi. Here's what goes into the process:

Wet waste

Wet Waste from the entire community and animal waste from the animal husbandry is collected and used for power entertainer from bio gas plant.

Dry Waste

Dry Waste is segregated, stored at a common point and is being given to the recycler. Other wastes like e-waste, Hazardous waste and sanitary waste are deposited at specific locations and handed over to the vendor for safe disposal.

Bio gas plant

2 ton capacity Bio Gas plant is located behind the entrance pavilion which is connected to 24 KW Bio Generator which can provide power up to 8 hours. Residual Manure is collected and used for plants

Garden Waste

Garden waste is mainly used for mulching and composting in the farms



The Organo Impact

Sustainability, Bio Diversity, Harnessing Natural Resources and Organic Living are the driving principles of Organo. However, it's not just within the community, but Organo has made an impact on the neighboring villages - Aziznagar, Yenkepally and Bakaram - as well. "Ecological balance cannot be achieved in isolation," says Lakshmi Battula, who is in charge of the farming and animal husbandry at Organo, "It is important to spread the science of organic farming to the surrounding areas as well. Otherwise, the soil, air and water contamination cannot be undone. Simply because, the chemically polluted air and water have an adverse impact on Organo

and may reverse the positive changes brought in the environment by Organic farming. That is why we have taken up the responsibility of creating awareness and sensitizing the farming communities followed by training them in organic farming as well as providing the necessary manure, pesticides and insecticides to the farmers."

That the impact has been tremendous and near perfect is reflected in the mindsets of farmers who have switched to nature's ways. "The reason I considered Organic farming is the fact that our soil had become depleted," explains Tirupati

Reddy, "The yield was reducing every year. It worried us because farming is our livelihood and everything will take a beating if our crops get affected. When we heard from one of Organo experts that this happens with prolonged use of chemicals, it was a wake-up call for us. The health benefits of organic yield was secondary at that time because we just wanted to feed our families first. After we started adopting techniques and organic products imparted to us by Organo, our crops have become abundant. The best part is, we don't have to go looking for a buyer, everything we produce is bought by Organo. For us, it is a win-win situation. In the process, we're also contributing to nature, and that makes us double happy." The Organo farming team visits

villages, mobilises the farmers, imparts training in Organo's fields first to ensure thorough transfer of practices and knowledge which then gets implemented by the farmers in their own farms.

The impact of Organo extends from empowering local farming communities by imparting organic farming techniques practices, producing organic vegetables, poultry, meats and milk, bee keeping, solar power generation to bio diversity. Organo derives its strength from the assistance of its conglomerate of highly qualified and experienced technical experts & associates from diverse fields.



Organo Naandi

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Co creating Eco Habitats that celebrate living