

Plant a tree with a few clicks

SankalpTaru's model also benefits farmers who help in maintaining the fruit-bearing trees and benefit from them

Nikita Mehta Jan 12 2016



SankalpTaru founder Apurva Bhandari. Photo: Ramesh Pathania/Mint

New Delhi: Home to 1.2 billion people, India is the second-most populated country in the world, but its tree-to-people ratio is not very high and stands at only 28 per person. China, the only country with a higher population, has 108 trees per person, according to a recent study published in *Nature*. To remedy the situation, technology-enabled non-government organization SankalpTaru Foundation is providing a platform to facilitate the planting of trees.

Its mobile app was launched in July 2013, aiming to bridge the gap between people's busy schedules

and their willingness to participate for an environment-friendly country.

The app helps people to plant at any desired location with a few clicks on the website or from their app, and in turn is used by the worker at the plantation site of SankalpTaru across India.

“We have plantation locations across India which range from Ladakh to Tamil Nadu. We have locations in Thar desert, Himalayas, Maharashtra and Gujarat,” said Apurva Bhandari, founder of SankalpTaru Foundation.

The model revolves around schools and rural farmers so that users can grow fruit-bearing trees

that can contribute to the livelihood of farmers or involve school students and teachers in plantation activity in schools.

SankalpTaru workers will plant a sapling on behalf of the person who selects a location and makes a contribution. A mail will confirm that the sapling has been planted.

The sapling is also photographed and geotagged by the ground-level worker so that the user can see its progress as it grows into a tree and the beneficiary who will nurture it. The user then gets regular growth updates to keep him/her more connected to the tree.

“For corporations, we have taken it a step further, where we create virtual forests for them through which different employees come to that virtual forest, plant trees and the virtual forest gives a lot of branding mileage to the company and connects a lot of employees who plant trees there,” said Bhandari.

The NGO works towards two objectives: to provide people who want to plant trees with a sustainable credible platform, thus making plantation more organized.

“People claim that they have planted 1 million plants in an hour, but what happens then? We decided that every plant that is planted should grow to become a tree,” said Bhandari.

The second objective was to facilitate livelihood support programmes through tree plantation for farmers. The on-ground coordinators work closely with the beneficiary farmers in maintaining the trees and also train these beneficiaries on sustainable farming methods.

Once grown, these medicinal and fruit-bearing trees can act as a source of livelihood for the beneficiaries.

The initiative won a Manthan award in 2015 in the e-Environment category.

“If you plant a tree in a park and it grows, there is an impact on the environment. But if you grow a plant for a farmer and it becomes a tree, then it becomes the source of livelihood. IT is helping integrating the whole process and making the process transparent,” said Bhandari.

Bhandari added that the biggest challenge initially was to mobilize resources, but as the concept offered transparency and visibility, many companies showed interest in the programme and helped it kick off.

The NGO has till now planted 316,665 trees across India and has tied up with 30 countries, while more than 21,000 people have been beneficiaries.

The first tree was planted by former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in Uttarakhand.

Mint has a strategic partnership with Digital Empowerment Foundation, which hosts the Manthan and mBillionth awards.

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