

## MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDERS AT TWENTY YEARS

Suri Sehgal—

When we established Sehgal Foundation twenty years ago with a vision to help uplift village communities in rural India, we did not want to be a “charitable” non-governmental organization (NGO) but a “development” NGO that is secular and non-political. In addition, we maintained a firm belief and a driving force that whatever we do must have impact and sustainability. We often heard from other NGOs in the field that sustainability is a “mirage” that every respectable development organization pursues but seldom achieves. In spite of this, we were determined to follow that guiding criteria in our work.



Since so many NGOs in India have a reputation for not being credible or transparent, we took the time to prove ourselves as credible, transparent, and accountable. We are pleased that Sehgal Foundation is now recognized in India as one of the most credible NGOs, known for demonstrating strong ethics, integrity, transparency, honesty, and accountability.

From the beginning, our teams understood that work in the field of development is a never-ending process. Thanks to our talented teams and generous partners from around the globe, work that started in four villages in (Mewat, now Nuh) Haryana, now reaches across India in eight states and continues to expand in collaboration with communities. To assure sustainability, all our projects begin with an initial survey on focused development areas followed by empowering the community with critical training in good rural governance. Monitoring of each project is continuous, and an impact assessment is done at the end. From time to time, we pull back for serious introspection of our work and make whatever changes are needed, discard what may not be working, and inject new ideas to ensure that the communities we serve are being positively impacted.

As long as people are living in poverty without food security, water security, or social justice, we can never be completely satisfied that our work is done. India and many other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are in similar stages of development. The work we do and the technologies we develop are applicable to most of these countries, so we must make sure our work is replicable and dynamic. We have been honored to present our innovations at the United Nations and offer them freely throughout the world.

We have come a long way in our short history. The growth of our key programs in agriculture development, water management, and good rural governance has been

organic and strategic. We have combined aspects of each program in our most successful initiatives such as the Transform Lives *one school at a time*, which is giving hope for a better future to India's rural schoolchildren.

As we enter our third decade in rural India, we resolve to continue Sehgal Foundation's ongoing re-evaluation and reinvention based on positive results and lasting impact. All in all, it is a wonderful feeling to be helping people, the society, and the planet, which makes our lives very satisfying. We are proud of what we do!

Edda Sehgal—

When Suri and I made the decision to create a foundation to do what we could to address the crushing poverty we saw in rural India, we had no previous experience in development work. You could say we were "innocent." We saw the looks of defeat, hopelessness, and suspicion on the faces of villagers, especially the women, who had been disappointed so often by false promises. We vowed to listen, and the team continued to experiment with a growing assortment of solutions to some of the most pressing issues. Those early years were a powerful educational experience. We were learning by doing, a method our teams still embrace.

In recent years we have seen the natural result of the team's early work and ongoing commitment to growth, impact, and sustainability in the three key programs (water management, agriculture development, and good rural development) as progress accelerates. For some years now, we have seen a totally new look on the faces of villagers in communities where we work. The sad faces we once knew are now alive with hope.

The Transform Lives *one school at a time* initiative has been a significant part of this because the results can be seen so directly by the beneficiaries and by our donor partners. When a poorly attended government school that is falling to pieces and has no drinking water or toilets is transformed into an attractive and nurturing learning environment with all needed amenities—including vital trainings in life skills, digital literacy, and good governance—the results can be vividly seen on the faces of the schoolchildren. Enrollment is up and communities are empowered in more and more ways. That is concrete, demonstrable change for the better.

The vision for the future is fantastic—a vision of ongoing rapid progress and movement for change that will continue to spread from village to village in all directions throughout India. I am confident that this will happen, perhaps not in my lifetime, but I believe it will happen.

We are proud of the Sehgal Foundation team, the work, and the results, and we thank every partner in the process—every individual, corporate, educational, and government partner; all the collaborating NGOs and nonprofit organizations with similar visions for a better world; and each person with a desire to help others feel hope for a better future.