CIRCULAR IMPACT REPORT 2024

Reporting our progress, actions
and transformations during FY 23-24

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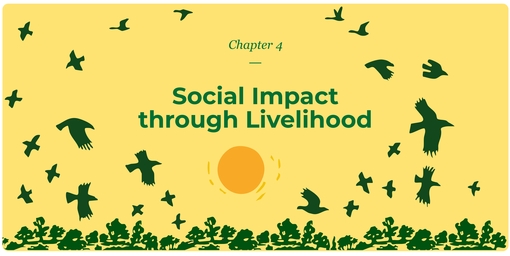

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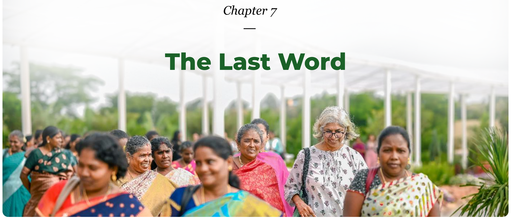


Chapter 1

Executive Summary

We walk and we ask...
Let's develop the system

Shobha Raghavan
CEO

Our first Circular Impact Report (CIR) was presented in 2020. The purpose of this report remains consistent through the last four years. The objective is to measure and analyze our impact in a manner that will stimulate introspection and bring attention to the gaps that we recognize within our own organization and in the larger ecosystem.

This report also continues to remind us of the primary purpose and mission of the organization – resource recovery leading to a circular and regenerative economy. It guides the change that we require to bring to the current system so that it aligns with the needs of the planet and all people.

In 2022-23, we received validation of our impact numbers through a third-party audit that was conducted by Aspire Impact. More than the gold rating that we received, we valued the critical feedback that put us on a path to do better.

Highlights from Aspire Impact Assessment FY 22-23

- Bring formal systems to the complete supply chain which means we will need all our vendor partners to be compliant on regulations.
- Focus on introducing renewable energy to our infrastructure and logistics.
- Focus on measuring impact through a dedicated impact manager

Based on this feedback, we have worked with our social inclusion partners to bring attention to fullfilling statutory compliance and building capacity towards contintues process improvement. The data management and tracking systems also enable us to measure our logistics footprint. These are, as yet, early developments which will play an important role in the movement towards systems change.

In 2023-24, we took another big step- we went through the rigorous process of getting an ISO certification (ISO 9001, 14,001 and 45,001) from TUV Sud. This certification of our operational processes has helped us bring excellence into our working framework along with attention to data management and impact measurement.

Our annual team gathering @ Namma Utsava, 2023

Here are key numbers for FY 23-24 which narrate our story and bring attention to the milestones in our journey:

Financials

Revenue
₹ 76 cr

Gross Margin
10.8%

Net Profits
1.39%

Social

Total staff strength
335

Vendor partners
500 +
(This includes our upstream, downstream and logistic partners)

Social Inclusion partners
149
(This includes aggregators and collection center operators and their field staff)

Environmental

Waste collected and processed
133 TPD

Landfill Diversion Rate
96 %
(valid for waste generated through our Zero Waste Programme)

On the financial front our revenues dropped this year from 85 Cr in FY22-23 to 76 Cr in FY 23-24. The reduction was largely from our e-waste vertical. The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations for both plastic and E-waste have gone through various revisions. Unfortunately, through these revisions, collection and aggregation systems have been diluted. Brands, on their part remained indifferent to ESG commitments. We are hopeful that the systems change, which we are advocating, will enforce a fair collection and aggregation system that will help MSMEs like us turnaround on both revenue and profitability.

Through the years, SZW has focused on business models which drive environmental and social impact alongside financial viability. As an organization that has demonstrated this at ground level, we believe that these business models need to be moved from the fringe, where they currently operate, into the mainstream.

We are looking to collaborate with all the stakeholders to bring a positive shift in the current waste management system.

Shobha Raghavan
CEO, Saahas Zero Waste

Home

Integrated Management Systems (IMS)

Chapter 2

Integrated Management Systems (IMS)

Attention to excellence

We recognise that a service provider like us needs to have operational excellence and attention to processes as a part of its DNA. This is our thought process behind signing up to become IMS certified.

The journey to become IMS certified began in April 2022 and we completed the process and received the certification from TÜV SÜD in May 2023.

The Waste Management sector in India is not known for its attention to excellence. SZW is one of the first companies that chose to get certified for ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015 & ISO 45001:2018 standards.

Additionally, we have around 26 SZW executives who have successfully completed the internal auditor certification training from TÜV SÜD which enables us to effectively drive the program within the organisation.

The TÜV SÜD logo is a universally respected as an independent and impartial symbol of safety, security and quality. It is a globally recognised worldwide. They are a leading certification, testing, auditing, inspection and training company

Exit training for field staff

ISO 9001- Employee & Process

- **Competency evaluation and skill matrix**: Introduction and implementation of a structured competency evaluation and skill matrix for all staff has helped us assess staff performance and track their journey towards excellence. These evaluations are used to plan specific training programs and facilitate job profile promotions based on data-driven insights.
- **SOP**: Supervisor's keen focus on a checklist and management of an SOP, has enabled the waste management units in our MRF and zero waste programme customer locations to become an ideal workplace.
- **Inspections and Trainings**: Inspections and trainings have enabled the sites to maintain health and safety standards. These efforts have resulted in less downtime and reduction in the frequency of incidents at sites.
- **Internal Audits**: The internal audits bring in consistent monitoring. These systems are now being acknowledged by our customers through recognitions and awards that we have received from RMZ Star Tech and other client locations

Extending the culture of excellence to our Social Inclusion Partners

Arun Shinde with his field staff

Our social inclusion partners are also trained and have access to the SOPs that have been introduced as part of our IMS certification. This approach has helped our partners to formalize their processes and improve operational standards.

A good example of this is **Arun Shinde**, who is one of our Social Inclusion Partners working in Pandhurna, Madhya Pradesh. When we first engaged with him as a supply chain partner, his facility faced challenges in areas such as occupational health and safety, material traceability, and data management.

Through our audits and training sessions, substantial improvements were made, including the implementation of fire protection measures, compliance with working hour and attendance regulations, and enhancements in in-house training and operational excellence, particularly in data management and traceability.

As Arun transitioned to a new facility, he continued to raise his standards, particularly in electrical safety, fire safety, machine safety, data management, and traceability, showcasing the positive impact of our partnership.

ISO 14001: a commitment to environmental stewardship

In adopting this standard SZW, had a good opportunity to evaluate the areas of influence where we could notch up our attention to environmental compliance and well-being. Currently, all our operations related to collection, sorting and aggregation fall under a white category (non-polluting operations as per the State Pollution Control Board).

We have introduced an Environmental Impact Assessment to evaluate, at an organisational level, the footprint of our operations and services. Aspects such as transportation, energy consumption, and water usage are categorized as negative impacts, whereas resource recovery and the use of waste as raw materials for product manufacturing are acknowledged as significant positive impacts, effectively offsetting the negative effects.

These aspects are being systematically documented to ensure effective environmental impact management. Data analysis and monitoring for each aspect is an ongoing improvement process, through which we aim to achieve a 10% annual reduction in GHG emissions.

In the next year, we will then extend this monitoring and scrutiny to our other supply chain partners as our committed continuous improvement initiatives.

ISO 45001 : Well being of our people

We are monitoring the ambient air quality on a yearly basis for our MRF in Jigani, Bangalore. We engaged an accredited laboratory to conduct the study which was done as per National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) & IS 5182 standards at our MRF in Jigani, Bangalore .

Indoor Air Quality Test Details

S.NO	Parameters	Unit	Results	Limits
1	Temperature	°C	26.2	22- 26 (for Summer) 20 - 24 (for Winter)
2	Humidity	%	52	Within 30 - 60
3	Suspended Particulate matter	mg/m3	2.9	75
4	Carbon Monoxide	ppm	ND	50
5	Carbon Dioxide	ppm	332	5,000

The results are within the specified limit, thus ensuring safe operation and environmental compliances.

This year, we introduced a QEHS policy which included the following measures:

Health checkup: Health check-up for all our staff is being done on a yearly basis.

Machine testing: Annual machine testing is conducted at our MRF. The results are within the specified limit, thus ensuring safe operation

Noise levels & work place lighting: To ensure that the work environment for the staff work is appropriate we monitor the noise levels & work place lighting through the Indoor Noise Monitoring & Lux Monitoring tests at the Mterial Recovery Facility.

Water Quality: Drinking water provided to staff is tested to ensure quality & hygiene.

Risk Assessment: Specific risks associated with Health & Work Safety at our facilities is assessed separately and documented

Grievance mechanism: Grievance mechanism as been introduced, providing employees with a platform to raise and resolve their issues. This service is open to all and includes a confidentiality clause to ensure trust in the process. Every employee, including field staff, has access to this platform, allowing for efficient issue management and resolution. Effectiveness found to be excellent as we were able to solve almost most of the issues, and we do have a tracker for that. We have facilitated a tie up with a nearby hospital to provide ambulance services when in need as the Field staff had raised this concern at the MRF facility. These analyses help us capture the hazards, mitigate risk at the workplace, and train staff effectively.

Certification for our Bulk-Waste Generator(BWG) customers

TRUE (Total Resource Use and Efficiency) is a comprehensive zero-waste certification program that we offer to Bulk Waste Generators who are committed to responsible waste management. It helps them define, pursue and achieve their zero waste goals.

In FY 23-24, SZW had the opportunity to mentor and support 8 projects who have achieved TRUE certification. The process involved creating policies, procedures and processes, conducting audits and assisting them with implementing recommendations.

Focus of the engagement was not only to enable them to achieve diversion of solid waste from landfill / incineration or Waste to Energy(WTE). It was primarily to identify opportunities to reduce and eliminate the type and quantum of waste, generated at source. Further, support was rendered in building a robust frame work to ensure clients are engaged with formal and professional waste management organizations. Thus, enabling them to achieve traceability to authorized end destinations.

TRUE brings a systems approach to waste management where generators adopt a structured approach that includes waste reduction along with reuse and finally recycling.

Chapter 3

Materials Recovery

When waste is managed at source, it becomes a resource

We currently operate within an economic system that prioritizes the extraction of raw materials, production and consumption.

This process does not include waste generation and the need for materials, at end of life, to circle back into the system. Globally, only a small fraction of materials are reintegrated into the economy through recycling or other circular strategies. According to the Circularity Gap Report 2023, just 7.2% of the global economy is circular.

At SZW, our vision of a zero-waste world through a circular economy can only be realized if all stakeholders shift their mindset to decouple economic growth from the consumption of finite resources while maximizing materials recovery. In the 21st century, this transition is essential to build a resilient system that benefits the environment alongside businesses and communities.

R2E

In Nov 2023, we set up a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and Textile Recovery Facility (TRF) in Sector 31, Gurugram. The 3,500 sq. ft. facility has a capacity to process 15 MT of dry waste per day, sourced from waste generators through a service fee and sale of waste model while ensuring compliance, maximising resource recovery and creating livelihood opportunities.

Our Materials Balance Sheet

In FY 23-24, **41,269 MT** of waste, from multiple sources was channeled through the SZW system. Plastic waste made up a huge chunk at 49% followed by E-waste (23%) and organic waste (21 %), which includes food and garden waste.

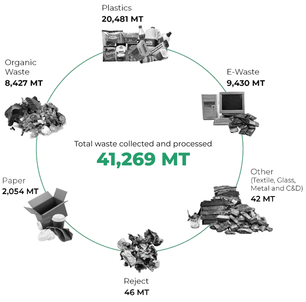
Of the total waste, waste is processed across different geographies at,

64% of recovered materials were recycled, 15% were used for biogas or composting, the most effective organic waste solutions for circularity.

While our landfill diversion rate remains at 1% of the total waste collected and processed, we recognize the need to go beyond recycling and landfill reduction to inch towards a completely closed-loop system for all recovered materials.

This year, less than 5% of the total plastic recovered went to a closed-loop recycling system, highlighting a significant opportunity for improvement.

Going forward, we will look to do a deeper analysis of our key waste streams to measure the levels of circularity and evaluate our end destinations for compliance to social regulations.



Current End Destinations

- Recycling **26,539 MT** (64%)
- Coprocessing **4,894 MT** (12%)
- Biogas **4,836 MT** (12%)
- Composting **1,431 MT** (3%)
- Authorised Landfill **458 MT** (1%)
- Waste management agencies/ Aggregators **3,110 MT** (8%)

Plastics

This year, we worked with 20,481 MT of plastic waste. This waste was sourced from different customers and vendor partners across 12 states. These vendor partners are aggregators and others who work with collection of different streams of waste. The plastic waste was also received through our zero-waste customers in tech-parks, educational institutions and residential complexes.

Of the total plastic waste, 38 % comprised of rigid plastic and 62% flexible plastic packaging waste including multi layered plastic.

Among rigid plastics, PET, HDPE, and PP account for 70-75% of the total sorted volume. These grades of plastic have a reasonable economic value between the range of Rs 38/kg-Rs 50/Kg. PET gets converted into fibres, HDPE gets converted into bottle to bottle and PP is used for making products for household or commercial purposes. The remaining rigid plastic types like PS, ABS, PC, HIPS, and others have limited formal end destinations, making their recycling pathways less established.

While 76% of plastic packaging waste is sent for recycling, only 5% undergoes closed-loop recycling—a key factor in achieving true circularity. Only one recycler, Banayan Nation, which processes PE and PP resins has a closed-loop recycling infrastructure.

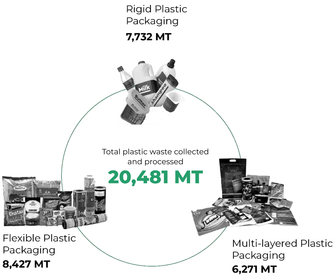
62% of the flexible plastic packaging wastes are composed of monolayers and multilayers, with monolayers (e.g., milk pouches, polythene bags) making up 40-50% of the total volume and holding a commercial value between ₹18-₹28/kg. Multilayer packaging is non recyclable, however, the commercial value in small volumes is gaining traction though a plastic credit framework.

To create a closed-loop system for plastics, designing for circularity must take precedence over everything else. An estimated 80% of a product's environmental impact is determined at the design stage(Source: Train The Trainers Handbook: Creating Circular Economy Innovation Clusters, 2023).

Currently, less than 1% of plastic waste is repurposed by SZW into consumer products such as eco boards made from flexible plastic waste. These boards are used for furniture, roofing, and other functional applications—a small but essential step toward a circular economy.

These details indicate how far behind we are in managing our plastic waste. Both on the technical front where plastics have to be brought back into manufacturing in closed loop systems and also on the economic front where the value of the plastic waste is not able to meet the complete cost of operations.

It is unfortunate that in the critical situation, we still find manufacturers, producers, and brands unwilling to take the necessary steps to address plastic waste management with the degree of consistency that is required.



Current End Destination

- Recycling **15,637 MT** (76%)
- Coprocessing **4,721 MT** (23%)
- Aggregator **122 MT** (1%)

Circle Up Products

Number of Units Sold

Ecoboards/ recycled board/ Roofing sheet
6,177

Furniture
94

Products (Coaster, Planter, Pen stand, Photo frame)
571

CIRCLE UP
Upcycled Products

Explore our recycled products

Integrated Management Systems (IMS)

Social Impact

Chapter 4

Social Impact

Jobs, Livelihood, Value

At SZW, we are committed to transforming resource recovery into a viable and respected career path.

Our team comprises 335 employees spread across Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, and Thiruvananthapuram, with a strong field presence of 66%. Notably, we have a substantial representation of women, making up 56% of our total workforce.

Given the nature of our operations, the field team is largely engaged in waste handling and sorting. The field team comprises people from difficult economy backgrounds and basic education levels. Secured jobs and livelihood with fair income becomes an important part of social impact.

Field staff sorting at SZW MRF, Jigani

Minimum wages

₹20,849 for unskilled workers

₹27,998 for highly skilled workers

In Bangalore, our clients in the Zero waste programme adheres strictly to minimum wages.

Living wages

₹29,970 for unskilled workers

₹40,936 for highly skilled workers

Going beyond, there are two of our clients, Goldman Sachs (GS) and Tesco who have introduced living wages.

We encourage all our customers to transition to living wages, as it fosters a financially and socially secured workforce.

These figures highlight the earning potential and stability for workers in the formal waste sector, reinforcing the importance of transitioning from informal to structured employment.

With the waste management sector offering immense career opportunities, our leadership and executive team are proof of how SZW provides a platform where skill, dedication, and purpose come together to build meaningful and rewarding careers.

Social Inclusion Programme

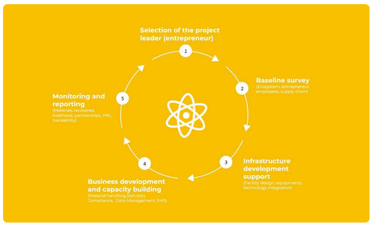
To execute our services, we depend on 500+ supply chain partners, including collection center operators, waste pickers, self-help groups, scrap dealers, and transporters. In FY23-24, these partnerships generated ₹69 crore in revenue with most stakeholders operating informally, leaving them vulnerable to market instability.

We have identified two critical social challenges affecting our supply chain partners:

Health and safety risks: Environmental, Health, and Safety (EHS) standards are often nonexistent or poorly enforced, creating hazardous working conditions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that waste workers face a fatality rate up to 10 times higher than the average worker. The physically demanding nature of the job, coupled with wage disparities and poor working environments, also leads to significant mental health challenges.

Exclusion from social and economic opportunities: According to the World Bank's Global Findex Database (2021), over 1.4 billion adults worldwide lack access to formal financial services. This financial exclusion limits the ability of waste sector entrepreneurs to scale their businesses, increase income, and improve workplace conditions.

To address these challenges, our Social Inclusion (SI) Programme equips supply chain partners with the tools and resources needed to transition into formal, professional business practices while ensuring long-term viability.



In FY 23-24, we actively supported nine entrepreneurs, six of whom registered their businesses after joining the programme. Entrepreneurs demonstrated improved business management skills, secured fundings, and enhanced workplace health and safety standards.

As a direct result, 140 indirect workers now have access to safer physical infrastructure, health insurance, and enrollment in welfare schemes.

Through these initiatives, SZW continues to drive systemic change, fostering safer working conditions and greater economic inclusion for waste workers. However, significant ecosystem barriers remain, making it challenging for businesses to fully transition to formal operations. Strengthening policy frameworks and industry collaboration will be key to overcoming these challenges and ensuring a sustainable, inclusive waste management sector.

SZW team with social inclusion entrepreneurs Ranjith, Sharan and chandha's team

Materials Recovery

Innovation

Innovation

Collective action towards change

We put considerable effort to ensure that our core values which we describe as BIIIHT (Resilience, Integrity, Impact, Innovation, Humility and Team) are tangible and visible through our work. In our report this year, we highlight innovation as it is a core value. Innovation is about finding solutions for every challenge.

In FY23-24, the two biggest challenges we faced included **the scaling of our impact** and **the effort to integrate excellence into operations.**

Here is how innovation was introduced to address these two challenges

Partnerships

We are clear that growing SZW is not as important as developing a systems approach for resource recovery and waste management. This systemic approach is needed so that the sector becomes mature and in turn attracts other like-minded organisations to come into this space with more confidence. This will bring us closer to a tipping point, where collectively many organisations will focus on environmental and social impact.

In FY 23-24, we developed some key partnerships that supported our strategic thinking so as to take us on this path of scaling impact.

Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW)

Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW) has partnered with SZW to integrate informal waste workers in five Indian cities into the formal economy while maximizing the recovery of low-value flexible plastic waste. Through this partnership, we aim to build an ethical supply chain that diverts low-value plastics from landfills and water bodies.

Launched in April 2022, the programme entered its second phase in May 2023, with both phases emphasizing social inclusion in the informal waste sector—particularly for waste aggregators and their workers. Across these phases, the project has supported five entrepreneurs in Bengaluru, Delhi, Kochi, Pandhurna, and Coimbatore, offering financial and assistance to formalize their businesses and create viable enterprises. This initiative has also contributed to improving working conditions for informal waste workers. Additionally, the programme has provided entrepreneurs with essential training in bookkeeping, health and safety, labor laws, and responsible waste management practices.

During Phase II, the project team worked with entrepreneurs to enhance the value of flexible plastic waste, successfully diverting a portion of it toward recycling. The programme managed to divert over 8,100 metric tons of plastic waste, with the support of five entrepreneurs and 46 workers.

To enhance transparency and data access across the value chain, SZW developed and piloted, a digital traceability tool that monitors the end-to-end movement of plastic waste. The team is now working with entrepreneurs to integrate this tool into their daily operations, further strengthening accountability and efficiency in waste recovery.

WWF- India

The partnership with **WWF** is anchored in Goa under a programme called Sustainable Approach to Integrated waste Management(SAIM). WWF is keen to mitigate the negative impact of waste on its conservation efforts. Plastic waste in our oceans and water bodies is a specific concern. SAIM has introduced a MRF in Goa which is currently operated by SZW.

IKEA Social Entrepreneurship B.V

In FY23-24 we continued our partnership with **IKEA Social Entrepreneurship** B.V. The partnership focused on an integrated approach to address plastic waste. The entrepreneurs were engaged in preprocessing of plastic waste which became a source of secondary raw material for IKEA. The project also provided traceability of the plastics, thus supporting IKEA's ambition to work with sustainable raw material and become a circular business by 2030.

Repurpose Global

Repurpose Global (RPG) has been our partner supporting us with plastic credits since 2019. They have a robust monitoring system for traceability that prevents data leaks and upholds global social responsibility standards.

In FY23-24, the project Sada Shakti in Bangalore recovered 427 MT of Low Value Plastic(LVP) and created 7 livelihood in Bommasandra collection centre.

Vishuddh Recyclers

Vishuddh Recyclers specializes in the recycling of LDPE (Low Density Polyethylene), particularly milk pouches, ensuring a sustainable and ethical approach to waste management. The company sets a benchmark for responsible recycling through its ethical sourcing price for its plastic waste.

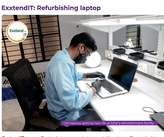
By fostering transparency and fair trade, Vishuddh Recyclers ensures that waste workers benefit directly from their ethical supply chain.

In FY23-24, the project recovered 20 MT of milk pouches and supported 7 upstream supplier and 100+ workers in the journey of formalisation and professionalisation.

Emerging Business Models

Our new business models are designed to deliver a depth of impact through waste reduction. These models reflect our ethos of planet and people before profits.

ExtendIT: Refurbishing laptop



ExtendIT is our effort to bring reuse into a social business. Through this business model we have introduced refurbishment of laptops. We acquire used laptops, restore them to peak performance through stringent quality control (50+ checkpoints), and offer them with a 1-year warranty and full traceability via QR codes.

SWAP: Embracing circular fashion

Our **swap shop** at our textile recovery facility in Bangalore brings out a circular fashion initiative to extend the life of textiles and reduce textile waste. Our swap model encourages mindful consumption by enabling individuals to declutter responsibly, repair and re-wear, and embrace pre-loved fashion.

Automation through Technology

In FY 23-24, our team focused on using technology to improve waste management operations. We worked on different solutions to make processes more efficient, data-driven, and easy to manage. Here's a simple breakdown of the key projects we worked on and their importance.

Digital Management System for Waste Processing Units (MIS)

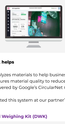
We improved a Zoho-based **Management Information System (MIS)** for waste processing units. This software helps track and record daily operations digitally, replacing traditional manual record-keeping.

Key Features

- Tracks key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor operations.
- Stores and manages operational data digitally.
- Uses analytics to help businesses make informed decisions.
- Automatically generates profit and loss (P&L) reports.
- Helps manage inventory with a stock dashboard.
- Can be customized as per user needs.

We also shared this software with other waste management companies under a SaaS model, and they found it helpful in managing their operations.

AI-Based Vision Quality Control System



We developed a **Vision Quality Control System** that uses AI and computer vision to assess the quality of plastic waste.

How It helps

- Analyzes materials to help businesses make better purchasing decisions.
- Ensures material quality to reduce financial losses from recyclables.
- Powered by Google's CircuitNet model, making it more precise.

We tested this system at our partner's facilities and our MRF in Jigani.

Digital Weighing Kit (DWK)

In partnership with **Factana Computing Pvt Ltd**, we developed an advanced **Digital Weighing Kit (DWK)**. This is an IoT-based system that replaces manual weighing records with a digital solution connected directly to a weighing scale.

Key Features

- Touchscreen display to enter details like source, vehicle, and material type.
- Automatic GPS-stamped image capturing for accurate documentation.
- Vehicle number detection for tracking.
- Seamless integration with our Zoho-based MIS for real-time data access.

Track & Trace - Smart Collection Tracking

We developed **Track & Trace**, a system that uses QR codes and GPS trackers to monitor waste collection routes.

Why It's Useful

- Automatically tracks waste collection using GPS technology.
- Uses analytics and reports to improve efficiency and reduce costs.
- Eliminates the need for manual tracking.
- Provides detailed, real-time data on waste collection.

We tested this system in collaboration with the Gram Panchayat in Udupi district. These innovations aim to make waste management more efficient, transparent, and data-driven. Our focus remains on developing solutions that improve processes and help businesses in the waste sector work efficiently.

Social Impact

Materials Recovery

Our Team

Unity in Diversity

Beyond leadership roles, real-life stories from our teams illustrate how conscious work ethics and professional growth can be achieved at all levels.

These success stories serve as powerful examples of the potential within the waste management sector, proving that dignified careers are possible for all those engaged in this critical industry.

Resource Recovery, A preferred career choice

Resource Recovery with its myriad complexities, is addressing critical environmental and social issues. For those of us who have chosen to work in this space, it's a sense of purpose that draws us in and keeps us going through barriers and challenges.

Nagveni

Nagveni joined SZW in 2017. Earlier she worked in the garden in one of our customer locations. She happened to meet one of our supervisors and decided that she would like to join SZW as a part of the field team.

She quickly learned the basics of identifying materials and sorting. *She was then ready for the next stage of her learning journey.* This is when she showed interest in understanding the protocols connected with Health and Safety. Our QEHS (Quality, Environment, Health and Safety) team needs to have champions among the field staff who will consciously keep a watch on situations which breach our health and safety standards. Nagveni is one champion who has been enrolled into a training programme so that she is able to identify and quickly report any unsafe situation to a manager.

Nagveni today works in our Jigni MRF. Her responsibilities includes ensuring that health and safety protocols are followed by each of her colleagues. It is good to see her commitment to resource recovery spill over to help her colleagues understand the importance of health and safety. As a mother of two children, her learning at work is also travelled to her home and community.

Her contribution to the home and family is also significant on the economic front. Both she and her husband have pooled their resources to build their own house.

Manjula

It's been three years since Manjula joined the field team at SZW. Earlier she worked in the garment industry where she experienced poor working conditions. The dust from cutting fabrics resulted in poor air quality. There was inadequate attention to safety. Unhealthy working conditions kept her frequently ill and she realized she was spending more time in bed than at work.

She was introduced to SZW through a friend who was working at our MRF. At first, she was hesitant but then hopful when she learned about our wage structure (more than what she got at the garment factory) benefits and other allowances.

Over time she witnessed a gradual improvement in her health. She also benefited from the annual health checkup where she was able to participate in preventive health measures.

Today Manjula continues to work at the MRF and shoulders the additional responsibility to be a part of the Emergency Response Team for which she has received extensive training.

Prem Lama

Prem Lama's journey with us started in 2023. Originally from Assam, Prem began his career in the battery manufacturing industry in Bangalore. His experience, then, have been for the most part, in the field of EHS. However, his prior EHS monitoring and training created an unsafe work environment for him and his colleagues. Concerned for his safety and future, Prem made a difficult but necessary decision 2 years back that he would no longer work under such dangerous conditions where he was exposed to improper chemical and material handling and there was no job-specific training provided.

Determined to find a safer and healthier workplace, Prem reached out to one of his neighbors in Bangalore, *who was working at* our MRF. After hearing about the organization's focus on safety and operational excellence, Prem applied for a job. He joined the MRF team, specifically in the baling section, and it was there that his career took a positive turn.

From the moment he joined, Prem was impressed by the extensive induction program, which included machine-specific operational training. This not only prepared him for his role but also gave him confidence in the safety protocols in place. Prem became deeply involved in the monthly training campaigns, toolbox talks, and awareness programs, eager to learn and grow in his role.

His dedication did not go unnoticed. His hands-on experience and passion for safety made him an excellent trainer, responsible for teaching new joinees how to safely operate baling machines. He takes great pride in his role, ensuring that the health and safety of his team are always a top priority.

Prem feels deeply respected in his role as a team leader and trainer. The trust placed in him to lead others and uphold safety standards has boosted his self-esteem and sense of purpose. His journey from a hazardous workplace to becoming a key figure in maintaining safety at our MRF has not only transformed his career but has also reinforced the value of a healthy and safe work environment.

Health care through ESIC support for extended family

Sumathi

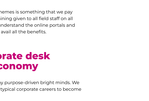
Sumathi is employed as a housekeeping staff in our corporate office. A person who takes pride in her work, and who is conscientious, she is a role model for clocking in on time with a cheerful attitude.

Sumathi is the sole bread winner of her family and supports her ailing husband as well as her son. Her husband suffered from acute lung inflammation and the operation and post operation recovery would have been unmanageable without the coverage of the ESIC. SZW ensured that this procedure was fully covered under ESIC. Our admin team was able to change the address so that she had access to the ESIC hospital in Chennai which was equipped to carry out the surgery.

Compliance to statutory benefits and empathy to our employees has always been a core of our impact, but seeing this benefit being used by our field staff in time is a deeply gratifying feeling for us.

Sudha

Sudha is a valued employee in our Textile Recovery Facility (TRF) in Bengaluru. She joined us in Feb 2021 and within 3 months of joining, get afflicted with dengue typhoid fever and dust allergy, a triple whammy on her health. This had her hospitalized for 10DX compliances, she was able to take free medical treatment from the ESIC hospital. These benefits encouraged her to continue working for us.



The last mile delivery of government schemes is something that we pay attention to. We have local language training given to all field staff on all government benefits. This helps them understand the online portals and government processes so that they can avail all the benefits.

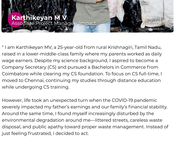
From a corporate desk to Circular Economy

Building a circular economy needs many purpose-driven bright minds. We are glad to see talent make a shift from typical corporate careers to become a part of our team.

"I am Lakshmi Narayanan working as an Associate Manager (Plastics) in Sashas Zero Waste, Bengaluru. Holding a masters in Finance and working in the IT corporate sector during 2019-21 for Sashas Zero Waste, I was just leading life in a bubble not thinking beyond my actions and its consequences.

Around 5 years ago, I learned about the impact of waste, over-exploitation of natural resources by humans and the factors of climate change. This realization made a massive impact as I began to analyze my behavior and to become a mindful human being. I am still trying to be an aspiring sustainable human being. I started to change my lifestyle and habits to align with nature. This has made me carry my own bag, water bottle, tiffin-box and cup along with cutlery. I also look to buy fresh and healthy food and also find ways of making my own tooth powder, laundry and dish wash liquids.

Transitioning my lifestyle led to a shift in career which actually connected with my inner self. "



" I am Karthikeyan MV, a 25-year-old from rural Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu, raised in a lower-middle-class family where my parents worked as daily wage earners. Despite my science background, I aspired to become a Company Secretary (CS) and pursued a Bachelors in Commerce from Coimbatore while clearing my CS foundation. To focus on CS full-time, I chose a distance learning course, enabling studies through distance education while undergoing CS training.

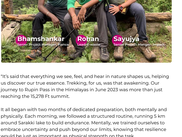
However, life took an unexpected turn when the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted my father's earnings and our family's financial stability. Around the same time, I found myself increasingly disturbed by the environmental degradation around me—littered streets, careless waste disposal, and public apathy toward proper waste management, instead of just feeling frustrated, I decided to act.

Against all advice, I left my CS path and sought opportunities in waste management, eventually securing an internship at Sashas Zero Waste. That pivotal moment set me on a new course, leading to a full-time role and my current position as Assistant Manager.

For me, nature comes first—everything else follows. There are countless professionals in technology and engineering, But far too few tackling the urgent environmental crises we face. I chose purpose over comfort, believing that success—whether financial or personal—will follow when we dedicate ourselves to meaningful work."

Strengthening connections with the team and nature beyond work

Our work and our private space complement each other. This is how a purpose driven career enhances the overall quality of life. By fostering meaningful relationships and staying connected to nature, we cultivate balance, well-being, and long-term fulfillment.



"It's said that everything we see, feel, and hear in nature shapes us, helping us discover our true essence. Trekking, for us, was that awakening. Our journey to Rupin Pass in the Himalayas in June 2023 was more than just reaching the 15,216 ft summit.

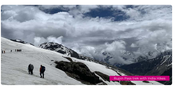
It all began with two months of dedicated preparation, both mentally and physically. Each morning, we followed a structured routine, running 5 km around Sarakki lake to build endurance. Mentally, we trained ourselves to embrace uncertainty and push beyond our limits, knowing that resilience would be just as important as physical strength on the trek.

From the day one of the trek, we learned that trekking is a team sport, not a race. The towering peaks allowed us passage, teaching us gratitude with every step. Each day brought new landscapes—villages, pine forests, boulder fields, and ice bridges—reminding us that the journey matters more than the destination.

With the weather changing every day, adaptability was key. Carrying a 15kg rucksack at high altitudes pushed our limits, yet we discovered a strength we never knew we had. Cut off from digital distractions, we connected deeper—with nature, our fellow trekkers, and ourselves.

Discipline played a crucial role. Strict morning routines and time adherence weren't just for efficiency but out of respect—for the mountains, campsite workers, and each other. Safety and care extended beyond personal well-being to protecting the environment. Thanks to India Hikes' Green Trails initiative, we trekked with a zero-waste mindset—carrying our own utensils, using eco-bags to collect litter, and educating fellow trekkers on responsible waste management.

Reaching the summit wasn't just about conquering a peak—it was about the journey we shared, the lessons we embraced, and above all obeying nature."



Innovation
The Last Word

Chapter 7

The Last Word

The natural habitat of a crow

This is a good time to reflect on an insightful book for children written by Yuval Noah Harari. It is called 'How Humans Took Over the World'. The book attributes the control of the human species over the planet to two factors.

- The ability to cooperate and
- The ability to tell stories

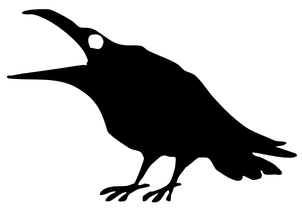
As a species we have done phenomenally well in using our intelligence to work together. Our phenomenal capability to cooperate has resulted in sharing knowledge, building businesses, creating markets and enabling many humans to live a good life.

Our intelligence could easily have also brought us into living in balance, alongside nature and with all other species on the planet. This is where unfortunately we took a wrong turn. In the last two hundred years, the biggest story that has dominated our lives is the linear economy.

We have listened to stories that make us believe that we can endlessly take and destroy nature in the name of development. The reciprocity and cooperation with nature has sadly eluded us.

Consider some hard numbers. The global economy in 2020-21 was $100 trillion. This economy, which is fueled largely through extraction of materials from nature, has grown from $ 38 trillion in 1990 to $ 51 trillion in 2000 to $ 100 trillion in 2021. In the process of growing this economy look at just how much materials we have extracted from nature. From 40 billion tonnes in 1990 to 50 billion tonnes in 2000 to 100 billion tonnes in 2023. CGR 2023

Thankfully the movement towards bringing humans back into balanced living is gaining momentum. We now have several 21st century thinkers like Kate Raeworth (Doughnut Economics), Jason Hickel (Degrowth), Richard Wolff (Democracy @Work), Ravi Chaudhury (Capitalism to Peopleism) who are giving direction to a new economic system that will take us beyond capitalism.

This year, in our report we have used imagery that we hope will nudge us to becoming better human beings. Let's begin by recognizing that a dumpsite, is not the natural habitat of a crow. If we have to bring the crow to its natural habitat then we have to completely remove dumpsites. This then remains the story of our way forward.

We are looking to eliminate the random dumpsites which dot both rural and urban India. But the removal of the dumpsite has to work in close association with resource recovery and the decentralized system that will bring us closer to a regenerative and a circular economy.