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## Goonj: Essence of Sustainability and Scalability of a Social Venture

While at a conference Anshu Gupta, the founder of Goonj, was asked about the purpose of a social venture and how to achieve it. Gupta replied, "It [is] the desire to make a difference in society that drives a social venture." The conference progressed and the discussion moved toward the need for social ventures to maximize social impact by generating enough revenue to ensure sustainability and scalability. Gupta felt a sense of déjà vu as speaker after speaker underlined the importance of developing suitable business models to generate revenues to achieve these objectives. He was concerned about this growing clamor for suitable business models in social ventures. He understood the importance of running social ventures efficiently and achieving financial sustainability. But Gupta was not convinced that the solution lay in adopting prevalent business models focused on generating revenues. He was concerned that this growing emphasis on revenue generation could distract the social ventures from their core purpose and hurt their credibility. He wondered whether this was the only way forward for social ventures, and reflected back on his experience at Goonj and how it approached these issues.

### Goonj: The Beginning

Goonj (meaning "Echo") was founded by Gupta and his wife, Meenakshi, in Delhi, India, in 1998 as a not-for-profit venture engaged in the collection, processing, and redistribution of used clothes and other materials. The initiative started with just 67 pieces of their own disused clothing. This grew to collecting clothes from friends and relatives for distribution among the needy living on the streets of Delhi.

Two approaches set Goonj apart from other such initiatives. First, rather than employing the usual episodic approach toward collecting clothes only during disasters or winters, it did so on an ongoing basis. Second, it processed clothes and other materials by repairing and repurposing them to suit the requirements of recipients before distributing them to the needy. Sensing the growing inequalities and the widening income gap, Goonj understood a fundamental dichotomy in India where getting rid of old clothes was a challenge for many urban households because of increased spending on clothing and limited storage space, while a large section of society still lacked adequate clothing. In essence, Goonj was engaged in channelizing used clothes by collecting them from "haves" who have a surplus of clothing lying idle and distributing them among "have-nots" who are in need of decent clothes but do not have the means to buy them.

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