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SughaVazhvu: An Affordable and Accessible Model for Last Mile Healthcare

“Be happy with what you have and are, be generous with both, and you won’t have to hunt for happiness.”

— William E. Gladstone

It was a hard decision for her. After obtaining her PhD in molecular diagnostics at ETH Zürich, Zeena Johar decided to return to India to make a positive change in healthcare for rural communities. Johar led the incorporation of SughaVazhvu Healthcare and the IKP Centre for Technologies in Public Health (ICTPH) in India. The organizations work jointly toward replicable and scalable service delivery networks at the interface of affordable healthcare technologies and innovative human resource solutions for hard-to-reach rural populations in India.

As of 2015, the Thanjavur-based SughaVazhvu Healthcare served more than 65,000 patients in 57 villages. Its founders have higher ambitions: They want to reach 1 million patients. Founded in 2009, SughaVazhvu (pronounced Sugha-Vaarv, which means “happy life” in Tamil) entered India’s rapidly changing healthcare landscape with the goal of reorganizing primary healthcare delivery in rural India through replicable community-driven initiatives, supported by technology and standardized healthcare protocols. Its ultimate goal is to create disease-free villages.

The company’s growth and accomplishments are commendable. Reflecting on the successful SughaVazhvu 5000 Challenge in February 2014, during which the organization reached 6,000 patients in the most impoverished communities of India, several questions were facing SughaVazhvu CEO Johar and her staff: Will the organization’s mindset fully shift from a medical experiment to a self-sustainable business model? How strong should the emphasis be on earning a sustainable profit? Will secondary and tertiary care providers want to partner with SughaVazhvu? What are the best modes of applying lessons learned to other parts of India?

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